



YOLANDE

The Story of a Daughter

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'A PRINCESS OF THULE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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TO

JAMES PAYN

*THIS STORY IS DEDICATED BY ONE OF
HIS MANY FRIENDS.*

LONDON, 1883.



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YOLANDE



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CHAPTER I.

RELEASED FROM CHÂTEAU COLD FLOORS.

LATE one evening in April, in a private sitting-room on the first floor of an hotel in Albemarle Street, a member of the British House of Commons was lying back in an easy-chair, having just begun to read, in an afternoon journal, an article about himself. He was a man approaching fifty, with what the Scotch call “a salt-water face”—that is to say, a face tanned and reddened with wind and weather; sharp of feature, and with hair become prematurely quite silver-white. At a first glance he seemed to have the air of an imperative, eager, aggressive person; but that impression was modified when by any accident you met his eyes, which were nervous, shrinking, and uncertain. Walking

in the street, he rarely saw any one ; perhaps he was too preoccupied with public affairs ; perhaps he was sensitively afraid of not being able to recognise half-remembered faces. When sitting alone, slight noises made him start.

This was what the man with the thin red face and the silver-white hair was reading :—

“ By his amendment of last night, which, as every one anticipated, was defeated by an overwhelming majority, the member for Slagpool has once more called attention to the unique position which he occupies in contemporary politics. Consistent only in his hopeless inconsistency, and only to be reckoned on for the wholly unexpected, one wonders for what particular purpose the electors of Slagpool ever thought of sending Mr. Winterbourne to Parliament, unless, indeed, it were to make sure that their town should be sufficiently often heard of in the councils of the nation. A politician who is at once a furious Jingo in foreign affairs and an ultra-revolutionary at home ; an upholder of the divine rights and liberties of the multitude, who, at the same time, would, if he

could, force them to close every public-house in the country, alike on Sunday and Saturday; a virulent opponent of Vivisection, who nevertheless champions the Game Laws, and who is doubtful about the abolition of Capital Punishment, probably because he would like to reserve to himself the right of hanging poachers: it may be conceded that such a member of Parliament, if he is not to be counted on by any party, or by any section or sub-section of any party—if, indeed, he is ordinarily a good deal more dangerous to his allies than to his enemies—may at least do some service to his constituents by continually reminding the country of their existence, while ministering on the same occasions to his own inordinate vanity. For it is to this—it is to an inordinate vanity, spurred on by an irritable and capricious temper, that we must look for the cause of those spasmodic championships and petulant antagonisms, those erratic appearances and disappearances, those sudden alliances and incomprehensible desertions, which have made of the member for Slagpool the very whirligig and teetotum of modern English politics."

When he had got thus far he stopped.

"It sounds like the writing of a young man," he was thinking. "But perhaps it is true. Perhaps that is what I am like. The public press is a mirror. I wonder if that is how I appear to Yolande?"

He heard a footstep outside, and immediately thrust away the newspaper from him, face downward. The next moment the door of the room was opened, and the framework of the door became the framework of a living picture. Mr. Winterbourne's face lightened up with pleasure.

The picture framed by the doorway was that of a young girl of eighteen, singularly tall and strikingly fair, who stood there hesitating, timid, half-laughing.

"Look," she said. "Is it your idea?"

"*Is it your idea!*" he repeated, peevishly. "Yolande, you are getting worse and worse, instead of better. Why don't you say, 'Is this what you meant?'"

"Is this what you meant?" she said, promptly, and with a slight foreign accent.

His eyes could not dwell on her for two seconds together, and be vexed.

"Come to the mirror, child, and put on your hat, and let me see the whole thing properly."

She did as she was bid, stepping over to the fireplace, and standing before the old-fashioned mirror, as she adjusted the wide-brimmed Rubens hat over the ruddy gold of her hair. For this was an experiment in costume; and it had some suggestion of novelty. The plain gown was of a uniform cream-white—of some rough towel-like substance that seemed to cling naturally to the tall and graceful figure; and it was touched here and there with black velvet; and the tight sleeves had black velvet cuffs; while the white Rubens hat had also a band of black velvet round the bold sweep of the brim. For the rest, she wore no ornaments but a thick silver necklace round her throat and a plain silver belt round her waist, the belt being a broad zone of solid metal, untouched by any graver.

But any one who had seen this young English girl standing there, her arms uplifted, her hands busy with her hat, would not have wasted much attention on the details of her costume. Her face was interesting, even at

an age when gentleness and sweetness are about the only characteristics that one expects to meet with. And although no mere catalogue of her features—the calm, clear brow ; the wide-apart, gray-blue eyes ; the aquiline nose, the unusually short upper lip and beautifully rounded chin ; her soft and wavy hair glistening in its ruddy gold ; and her complexion, that was in reality excessively fair, only that an abundance of freckles, as well as the natural rose-colour of youth in her cheeks, spoke of her not being much afraid of the sun and of the country air—although no mere enumeration of these things is at all likely to explain the unnameable grace that attracted people to her, yet there was at least one expression of her face that could be accounted for. That unusually short upper lip, that has been noted above, gave a slight pensive droop to the mouth whenever her features were in repose ; so that, when she suddenly looked up, with her wide, wondering, timid, and yet trustful eyes, there was something pathetic and wistful there. It was an expression absolutely without intention ; it was inexplicable and also winning ; it seemed to

convey a sort of involuntary unconscious appeal for gentleness and friendship, but beyond that it had no significance whatsoever. It had nothing to do with any sorrow, suffered or foreshadowed. So far the girl's existence had been passed among the roses and lilies of life; the only serious grievance she had ever known was the winter coldness of the floors in the so-called château in Brittany where she had been educated. And now she was emancipated from the discipline of the Château Cold Floors, as she had named the place; and the world was fair around her; and every day was a day of gladness to her, from the first "Good-morning!" over the breakfast-table to the very last of all the last and lingering "Good-nights!" that had to be said before she would let her father go down to put in an appearance at the House.

This must be admitted about Yolande Winterbourne, however, that she had two very distinct manners. With her friends and intimates she was playful, careless, and not without a touch of humorous wilfulness; but with strangers, and especially with strangers abroad, she could assume in the

most astonishing fashion the extreme coldness and courtesy of an English Miss. Remember, she was tall, fair, and English-looking; that (when all the pretty, timid trustfulness and merriment was out of them) her eyes were wide apart and clear and contemplative; and further, that the good dames of the Château Cold Floors had instructed her as to how she should behave when she went travelling with her father—which happened pretty often. At the *table d'hôte*, with her father present, she was as light-hearted, as talkative, as pleasant, as any one could wish. In the music-room after dinner, or on the deck of a steamer, or anywhere, with her father by accident absent, she was the English Miss out-and-out, and no aside conversations were possible. “So proud—so reserved, so English,” thought many an impressionable young foreigner, who had been charmed with the bright, variable, vivacious face as it had regarded him across the white table-cover and the flowers. Yolande’s face could become very calm—even austere on occasion.

“Is it what you meant?” she repeated,

turning to him from the mirror. Her face was bright enough now.

“Oh yes,” said he, rather reluctantly. “I—I thought it would suit you. But you see, Yolande—you see—it is very pretty—but for London—to drive in the Park—in London—wouldn’t it be a little conspicuous?”

Her eyes were filled with astonishment; his rather wandered away nervously to the table.

“But, papa, I don’t understand you! Everywhere else you are always wishing me to wear the brightest and lightest of colours. I may wear what I please—and that is only to please you, that is what I care about only—anywhere else—if we are going for a walk along the Lung’ Arno, or if we go for a drive in the Prater—yes, and at Oatlands Park, too, I cannot please you with enough bright colours; but here, in London, the once or twice of my visits——”

“Do speak English, Yolande,” said he, sharply. “Don’t hurry so.”

“The once or twice I am in London, oh no! Everything is too conspicuous! Is it

the smoke, papa? And this time I was so anxious to please you—all your own ideas; not mine at all. But what do I care?" She tossed the Rubens hat on to the couch that was near. "Come! What is there about a dress? It will do for some other place, not so dark and smoky as London. Come—sit down, papa—you do not wish to go away to the House yet! You have not finished about Godfrey of Bouillon."

"I am not going to read any more Gibbon to you to-night, Yolande," said he; but he sat down all the same, in the easy-chair, and she placed herself on the hearthrug before him, so that the soft, ruddy gold of her hair just touched his knees. It was a pretty head to stroke.

"Oh, do you think I am so anxious about Gibbon, then?" she said, lightly, as she settled herself into a comfortable position. "No. Not at all. I do not want any more Gibbon. I want you. And you said this morning there would be nothing but stupidity in the House to-night."

"Well, now, Miss Inveigler, just listen to

this," said he, laying hold of her by both her small ears. "Don't you think it prudent of me to show up as often as I can in the House—especially when there is a chance of a division—so that my good friends in Slagpool mayn't begin to grumble about my being away so frequently? And why am I away? Why do I neglect my duties? Why do I let the British Empire glide on to its doom? Why, but that I may take a wretched schoolgirl—a wretched, small-brained, impertinent, prattling schoolgirl—for her holidays; and show her things she can't understand; and plough through museums and picture-galleries to fill a mind that is no better than a sieve? Just think of it. The British Empire going headlong to the mischief all for the sake of an empty-headed schoolgirl!"

"Do you know, papa, I am very glad to hear that?" she said, quietly.

"Glad, are you?"

"Yes," said she, nestling closer to him, "for now I think my dream will soon be coming true."

"Your dream?"

"My dream. The ambition of my life,"

said she, seriously. "It is all I wish for and hope for. Nothing else—nothing else in the world."

"Bless us all!" said he, with a touch of irony. "What wonderful ambition is this?"

"It is to make myself indispensable to you," she said, simply.

He took his hands from her ears and put them on her hair, for there were some bits of curls and semi-ringlets about her neck that wanted smoothing.

"You are not indispensable, then?" said he.

"Listen now, papa; it is your turn," she said. "Surely it is a shame that you have wasted so much time on me, through so many years—always coming to see me and take me away—perhaps not a week between—and I glad enough, for it was always expectation and expectation—and my things always ready—and you, poor papa, wasting all your time, and always on the route, and that such a long way to Rennes. Even at Oatlands Park the same—up and down—up and down by rail—and then long beautiful days that were very good to me, but were

stupid to you, when you were thinking of the House all the time. Very well, now, papa ; I have more sense now ; I have been thinking ; I want to be indispensable to you ; I want to be in London with you—always ; and you shall never have to run away idling, either to the Continent or to Oatlands Park ; and you shall never have to think that I am wearying for you—when I am always with you in London. That is it now ; that I wish to be your private secretary.”

Her demand once made, she turned up her face to him ; he averted his eyes.

“ No, no, Yolande,” he said, hastily—and even nervously. “ London won’t do for you—it—it wouldn’t do at all. Don’t think of it even.”

“ Papa,” said she, “ what other member of Parliament, with so much business as you have, is without a private secretary ? Why should you answer all those letters yourself ? For me, I will learn politics very quickly ; I am studying hard ; at the château I translated all your speeches into Italian, for exercises. And just to think that you have never allowed me to hear you speak in the House ! When

I come to London—yes, for five minutes or half-an-hour at a time—the ladies whom I see will not believe that I have never once been in the—the what is it called?—for the ladies to listen in the House? No, they cannot believe it. They know all the speakers; they have heard all the great men; they spend the whole of the evening there, and have many come to see them—all in politics. Well, you see, papa, what a burden it would be taking off your hands. You would not always have to come home and dine with me, and waste so much of the evening in reading to me;—no, I should be at the House, listening to you, and understanding everything. Then all the day here, busy with your letters. Oh, I assure you I would make prettier compliments to your constituents than you could think of; I would make all the people of Slagpool who write to you think you were the very best member they could choose. And then—then I should be indispensable to you."

"You are indispensable to me, Yolande. You are my life. What else do I care for?" he said, hurriedly.

" You will pardon me, papa, if I say it is foolish. Oh, to think now! One's life is more important than that, when you have the country to guard."

" They seem to think there," said he, with a sardonic smile, and he glanced at the newspaper, " that the country would be better off without me."

It was too late to recall this unfortunate speech. He had thrust aside the newspaper as she entered, dreading that by accident she might see the article and be wounded by it; but now there was no help for it; the moment he had spoken she reached over and took up the journal, and found her father's name staring her in the face.

" Is it true, Yolande?" said he, with a laugh. " Is that what I am like?"

As she read, Yolande tried at first to be grandly indifferent—even contemptuous. Was it for her, who wished to be of assistance to her father, in public affairs, to mind what was said about him in a leading article? And then, in spite of herself, tears slowly rose and filled the soft gray-blue eyes—though she kept her head down, vainly try-

ing to hide them. And then mortification at her weakness made her angry ; and she crushed up the paper twice and thrice, and hurled it into the fire ; nay, she seized hold of the poker and thrust and drove the offending journal into the very heart of the coals. And then she rose, proud and indignant (but with her eyes a little wet), and with a toss of her pretty head she said—

“ It is enough time to waste over such folly. Perhaps the poor man has to support a family ; but he need not write such stupidity as that. Now, papa, what shall I play for you ? ”

She was going to the piano. But he had risen also.

“ No, no, Yolande. I must be off to the House. There is just a chance of a division ; and perhaps I may be able to get in a few words somewhere, just to show the Slagpool people that I am not careering about the Continent with my schoolgirl. No, no ; I will see you safe in your own room, Yolande ; and your lamp lit, and everything snug : then —Good-night ! ”

"Already?" she said, with a great disappointment in her face. "Already?"

"Child, child, the affairs of this mighty Empire——"

"What do I care about the Empire!" she said.

He stood and regarded her calmly.

"You are a nice sort of person to wish to be private secretary to a member of Parliament."

"Oh, but if you will only sit down for five minutes, papa," she said piteously, "I could explain such a lot to you——"

"Oh yes, I know. I know very well. About the temper Madame was in when the curls fell out of her box."

"Papa, it is you who make me frivolous. I wish to be serious——"

"I am going Yolande."

She interposed.

"No. Not until you say, 'I love you.'"

"I love you."

"And I forgive you."

"And I forgive you."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"And I may go out to-morrow morning as early as ever I like, to buy some flowers for the breakfast-table?"

But this was hard to grant.

"I don't like your going out by yourself, Yolande," said he, rather hesitatingly. "You can order flowers. You can ring and tell the waiter——"

"The waiter!" she exclaimed. "What am I of use for, then, if it is a waiter who will choose flowers for your breakfast-table, papa? It is not far to Covent Garden."

"Take Jane with you, then."

"Oh yes."

So that was settled; and he went upstairs with her to see that her little silver reading-lamp was properly lit; and then he bade her the real last good-night. When he returned to the sitting-room for his hat and coat, there was a pleased and contented look on his face.

"Poor Yolande!" he was thinking; "she is more shut up here than in the country; but she will soon have the liberty of Oatlands Park again."

He had just put on his coat and hat, and

was giving a last look round the room to see if there was anything he ought to take with him, when there was a loud, sharp crash at the window. A hundred splinters of glass fell on to the floor; a stone rolled over and over to the fireplace. He seemed bewildered only for a second; and perhaps it was the startling sound that had made his face grow suddenly of a deadly pallor; the next second—noiselessly and quickly—he had stolen from the room, and was hurriedly descending the stair to the hall of the hotel.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW BEHIND.

THE head waiter was in the hall, alone, and staring out through the glass door. When he heard some one behind him, he turned quickly, and there was a vague alarm in his face.

“The——the lady, sir, has been here again.”

Mr. Winterbourne paid no heed to him; passed him hastily, and went out. The lamp-light showed a figure standing there on the pavement—the figure of a tall woman, dark and pale, who had a strange, dazed look in her eyes.

“I thought I’d bring you out!” she said, tauntingly, and with a slight laugh.

“What do you want?” he said, quickly, and under his breath. “Have you no shame, woman! Come away. Tell me what you want!”

“You know what I want,” she said,

sullenly. "I want no more lies." Then an angrier light blazed up in the impassive, emaciated face. "Who has driven me to it, if I have to break a window? I want no more lies and hidings. I want you to keep your promise; and if I have to break every window in the House of Commons, I will let everybody know. Whose fault is it?"

But her anger seemed to die away as rapidly as it had arisen. A dull, vague, absent look returned to her face.

"It is not my fault."

"What madness have you got hold of now!" he said, in the same low and nervous voice—and all his anxiety seemed to be to get her away from the hotel.

"Come along and tell me what you want. You want me to keep my promise—to you, in this condition?"

"It is not my fault," she repeated, in a listless kind of way; and now she was quite obediently and peaceably following him; and he was walking towards Piccadilly, his head bent down.

"I suppose I can guess who sent you," he said, watching her narrowly. "I suppose

it was not for nothing you came to make an exhibition of yourself in the public streets. They asked you to go and get some money?"

This seemed to put a new idea into her head; perhaps that had been his intent.

"Yes. I will take them some money, if you like," she said, absently. "They are my only friends now—my only friends. They have been kind to me—they don't cheat me with lies and promises—they don't put me off, and turn me away when I ask for them. Yes, I will take them some money."

And then she laughed—a short, triumphant laugh.

"I discovered the way to bring some one out!" she said—apparently to herself.

By this time they had reached the corner of Piccadilly, and, as a four-wheeled cab happened to be passing, he stopped it, and himself opened the door. She made no remonstrance; she seemed ready to do anything he wished.

"Here is some money. I will pay the driver."

She got into the cab quite submissively;

and the man was given the address, and paid. Then the vehicle was driven off; and he was left standing on the pavement, still somewhat bewildered, and not conscious how his hands were trembling.

He stood uncertain only for a second or so; then he walked rapidly back to the hotel.

“Has Miss Winterbourne’s maid gone to bed yet?” he asked of the landlady.

“Oh no, sir; I should think not, sir;” the buxom person answered: she did not observe that his face was pale and his eyes nervous.

“Will you please tell her, then, that we shall be going down to Oatlands Park again to-morrow morning? She must have everything ready; but she is not to disturb Miss Winterbourne to-night.”

“Very well, sir.”

Then he went into the coffee-room, and found the head waiter.

“Look here,” said he (with his eyes averted), “I suppose you can get a man to put in a pane of glass in the window of our sitting-room—the first thing in the morning? There has been some accident, I suppose.

You can have it done before Miss Winterbourne comes down, I mean?"

He slipped a sovereign into the waiter's hand.

"I think so, sir. Oh yes, sir."

"You must try to have it done before Miss Winterbourne comes down."

He stood for a moment, apparently listening if there was any sound upstairs; and then he opened the door again and went out. Very slowly he walked away through the lamp-lit streets, seeing absolutely nothing of the passers-by, or of the rattling cabs and carriages; and although he bent his steps Westminster-wards, it was certainly not the affairs of the nation that had hold of his mind. Rather he was thinking of that beautiful fair young life—that young life so carefully and tenderly cherished and guarded, and all unconscious of this terrible black shadow behind it. The irony of it! It was this very night that Yolande had chosen to reveal to him her secret hopes and ambition; she was to be always with him; she was to be "indispensable;" the days of her banishment were to be now left behind; and these

two, father and daughter, were to be inseparable companions henceforth and for ever. And his reply? As he walked along the half-deserted pavements, anxiously revolving many things, and dreaming many dreams about what the future might have in store for her, and regarding the trouble and terrible care that haunted his own life, the final summing-up of all his doubts and fears resolved itself into this—If only Yolande were married! The irony of it! She had besought him out of her love for him, and out of her gratitude for his watchful and unceasing care of her, that she should be admitted into a closer companionship; that she should become his constant attendant and associate and friend; and his answer was to propose to hand her over to another guardianship altogether—the guardianship of a stranger. If only Yolande were married!

The light was burning on the clock-tower, and so he knew the House was still sitting; but he had no longer any intention of joining in any debate that might be going forward. When he passed into the House (and more than ever he seemed to wish to avoid the

eyes of strangers) it was to seek out his friend, John Shortlands, whose rough common sense and blunt counsel had before now stood him in good stead, and served to brace up his unstrung nerves. The tall, corpulent, big-headed ironmaster—who also represented a northern constituency—he at length found in the smoking-room, with two or three companions, who were seated round a small table, and busy with cigars and brandy and soda. Winterbourne touched his friend lightly on the shoulder.

"Can you come outside for a minute?"

"All right."

It was a beautiful, clear, mild night; and seated on the benches on the Terrace there were several groups of people—among them two or three ladies, who had, no doubt, been glad to leave the stuffy Chamber to have tea or lemonade brought them in the open, the while they chatted with their friends and regarded the silent, dark river and the lights of the Embankment and Westminster Bridge. As Winterbourne passed them, he could not but think of Yolande's complaint that she had never even once been in the House

of Commons. These were, no doubt, the daughters or wives or sisters of members : why should not Yolande also be sitting there ? It would have been pleasant for him to come out and talk to her—pleasanter than listening to a dull debate. Would Yolande have wondered at the strange night-picture—the broad black river, all quivering with golden reflections ; the lights on the bridge ; the shadowy grandeur of this great building reaching far overhead into the star-lit skies ? Others were there ; why not she ?

The Terrace of the House of Commons is at night a somewhat dusky promenade—when there does not happen to be moonlight ; but John Shortlands had sharp eyes ; and he instantly guessed from his friend's manner that something had happened.

“ More trouble ? ” said he, regarding him.

“ Yes,” said the other. “ Well, I don’t mind—I don’t mind, as far as I am concerned. It is no new thing.”

But he sighed, in spite of his resigned way of speech.

“ I have told you all along, Winterbourne,

that you brought it on yourself. You should ha' taken the bull by the horns——”

“It is too late to talk of it—never mind that now,” he said, impatiently. “It is about Yolande I want to speak to you.”

“Yes?”

Then he hesitated. In fact, his lip trembled for the briefest part of a second.

“You won’t guess what I am anxious for now,” he said, with a sort of uncertain laugh. “You wouldn’t guess it in a month, Shortlands. I am anxious to see Yolande married.”

“Faith, that needn’t trouble you,” said the big ironmaster, bluntly. “There’ll be no difficulty about that. Yolande has grown into a thundering handsome girl. And they say,” he added jocosely, “that her father is pretty well off.”

They were walking up and down slowly; Mr. Winterbourne’s face absent and hopeless at times, at times almost piteous, and again lightening up as he thought of some brighter future for his daughter.

“She cannot remain longer at any school,” he said, at length, “and I don’t like leaving

her by herself at Oatlands Park or any similar place. Poor child! Do you know what her own plans are? She wants to be my private secretary. She wants to share the life that I have been leading all these years——”

“And so she might have done, my good fellow, if there had been any common sense among the lot o’ ye——”

“It is too late to speak of that now,” the other repeated, with a sort of nervous fretfulness. “But indeed it is hard on the poor girl. She seems to have been thinking seriously about it. And she and I have been pretty close companions, one way or another, of late years.—Well, if I could only see her safely married and settled—perhaps living in the country, where I could run down for a day or so—her name not mine—perhaps with a young family to occupy her and make her happy—well, then, I think I should be able to put up with the loss of my private secretary. I wonder what she will say when I propose it. She will be disappointed—perhaps she will think I don’t care for her—when there is just not another creature in the

world I do care for—she may think it cruel and unnatural——”

“Nonsense, nonsense, man. Of course a girl like Yolande will get married. Your private secretary! How long would it last? Does she look like the sort of girl who ought to be smothered up in correspondence or listening to debates? And if you’re in such a mighty hurry to get rid of her—if you want to get her married at once, I’ll tell you a safe and sure way—send her for a voyage on board a P. and O. steamer.”

But this was just somewhat too blunt; and Yolande’s father said, angrily—

“I don’t want to get rid of her. And I am not likely to send her anywhere; hitherto we have travelled together—and we have found it answer well enough, I can tell you. Yolande isn’t a bale of goods, to be disposed of to the first bidder. If it comes to that, perhaps she will not marry any one.”

“Perhaps,” said the other, calmly.

“I don’t know that I may not throw Slagpool over and quit the country altogether,” he exclaimed, with a momentary recklessness. “Why shouldn’t I? Yolande is fond of

travelling. She has been four times across the Atlantic now. She is the best companion I know: I tell you I don't know a better companion. And I am sick of the way they're going on here." (He nodded in the direction of the House.) "Government? They don't govern; they talk. A Parliamentary victory is all they think about; and the country going to the mischief all the time. No matter, if they get their majority; and if they can pose before the world as the most moral and exemplary Government that ever existed. I wonder they don't give up Gibraltar to Spain; and hand over Malta to Italy; and then they ought to let Ireland go, because she wants to go; and certainly they ought to yield up India, for India was stolen; and then they might reduce the Army and the Navy, to set an example of disarmament; so that at last the world might see a spectacle!—a nation permitted to exist by other nations because of its uprightness and its noble sentiments. Well, that has nothing to do with Yolande; except that I think she and I could get on very well even if we left England to pursue its course of high morality. We could look

on—and laugh, as the rest of the world are doing."

"My dear fellow," said Shortlands, who had listened to all this high treason with calmness; "you could no more get on without the excitement of worrying the Government than without meat and drink. What would it come to? You would be in Colorado, let us say; and some young fellow in Denver, come in from the plains, would suddenly discover that Yolande would be an adorning feature for his ranche; and she would discover that he was the handsomest young gentleman she ever saw; and then where would you be? You wouldn't be much good at a ranche. The morning papers would look tremendous empty without the usual protest against the honourable member for Slagpool so grossly misrepresenting the action of the Government. My good fellow, we can't do without you in the House; we might as well try to do without the Speaker."

For a few seconds they walked up and down in silence; at last Winterbourne said with a sigh—

"Well, I don't know what may happen; but

in the meantime I think I shall take Yolande away for another long trip somewhere——”

“Again? Already?”

“I don’t care where; but the moment I find myself on the deck of a ship, and Yolande beside me, then I feel as if all care had dropped away from me. I feel safe; I can breathe freely. Oh, by the way! I meant to ask if you knew anything of a Colonel Graham? You have been so often to Scotland shooting. I thought you might know.”

“But there are so many Grahams——”

“Inverstroy, I think, is the name of his place.”

“Oh, *that* Graham. Yes, I should think so—a lucky beggar. Inverstroy fell plump into his hands some three or four years ago—quite unexpectedly—one of the finest estates in Inverness-shire. I don’t think India will see him again.”

“His wife seems a nice sort of woman?” said Mr. Winterbourne, with the slightest touch of interrogation.

“I don’t know her. She is his second wife. She is a daughter of Lord Lynn.”

“They are down at Oatlands just now.

Yolande has made their acquaintance, and they have been very kind to her. Well, this Colonel Graham was saying the other evening that he felt as though he had been long enough in the old country, and would like to take a P. and O. trip as far as Malta, or Suez, or Aden, just to renew his acquaintance with the old route. In fact, they proposed that Yolande and I should join them."

"The very thing!" said John Shortlands, facetiously. "What did I say? A P. and O. voyage will marry off anybody who is willing to marry."

"I meant nothing of the kind," said the other, somewhat out of temper: "Yolande may not marry at all. If I went with these friends of hers it would not be 'to get rid of her,' as you say."

"My dear fellow, don't quarrel with me," said his friend, with more consideration than was habitual with him. "I really understand your position very well. You wish to see Yolande married and settled in life and removed from—from certain possibilities. But you don't like the sacrifice; and I don't wonder at that; I admit it will be rather

rough on you. But it is the way of the world ; other people's daughters get married. Indeed, Winterbourne, I think it would be better for both of you. You would have less anxiety. And I hope she'll find a young fellow who is worthy of her ; for she is a thundering good girl, that's what I think ; and whoever he is he'll get a prize—though I don't imagine you will be over well disposed towards him, old chap."

" If Yolande is happy, that will be enough for me," said the other, absently, as Big Ben overhead began to toll the hour of twelve.

By this time the Terrace was quite deserted ; and after some little further chat (Mr. Winterbourne had lost much of his nervousness now, and of course all his talking was about Yolande, and her ways, and her liking for travel, and her anxiety to get rid of her half-French accent, and so forth), they turned into the House, where they separated, Winterbourne taking his seat below the gangway on the Government side, John Shortlands depositing his magnificent bulk on one of the Opposition benches.

There was a general hum of conversation.

There was also, as presently appeared, some laborious discourse going forward on the part of a handsome-looking elderly gentleman—a gentleman who, down in the country, was known to be everything that an Englishman could wish to be: an efficient magistrate, a plucky rider to hounds, an admirable husband and father, and a firm believer in the Articles of the Church of England. Unhappily, alas, he had acquired some other beliefs. He had got it into his head that he was an orator; and as he honestly did believe that talking was of value to the State—that it was a builder up and maintainer of Empire—he was now most seriously engaged in clothing some rather familiar ideas in long and Latinised phrases, the while the House murmured to itself about its own affairs, and the Speaker gazed blankly into space, and the reporters in the Gallery thought of their courting days, or of their wives and children, or of their supper, and wondered when they were to get home to bed. The speech had a half somnolent effect; and those who were so inclined had an excellent opportunity for the dreaming of dreams.

What dreams, then, were likely to visit the brain of the member for Slagpool, as he sat there with his eyes distraught? His getting up some fateful evening to move a vote of want of confidence in the Government? His appearance on the platform of the Slagpool Mechanics' Institute, with the great mass of people rising and cheering and waving their handkerchiefs? Or perhaps some day—for who could tell what changes the years might bring?—his taking his place on the Treasury bench there?

He had got hold of a bluebook. It was the Report of a Royal Commission; but of course all the cover of the folio volume was not printed over—there were blank spaces. And so (while those laborious and ponderous sentences were being poured out to inattentive ears) the member for Slagpool began idly and yet thoughtfully to pencil certain letters up at one corner of the blue cover. He was a long time about it; perhaps he saw pictures as he slowly and contemplatively formed each letter; perhaps no one but himself could have made out what the uncertain pencilling meant. But it was not of politics

he was thinking. The letters that he had faintly pencilled there—that he was still wistfully regarding as though they could show him things far away—formed the word *YOLANDE*. It was like a lover.

CHAPTER III.

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT.

NEXT morning his nervous anxiety to get Yolande away at once out of London was almost pitiable to witness, though he strove as well as he could to conceal it from her. He had a hundred excuses. Oatlands was becoming very pretty at that time of the year. There was little of importance going on in the House. London was not good for the roses in her cheeks. He himself would be glad of a breather up St. George's Hill, or a quiet stroll along to Chertsey. And so forth ; and so forth.

Yolande was greatly disappointed. She had been secretly nursing the hope that at last she might be allowed to remain in London, in some capacity or another, as the constant companion of her father. She had enough sense to see that the time consumed in his continually coming to stay with her in

the country must be a serious thing for a man in public life. She was in a dim sort of way afraid that these visits might become irksome to him, even although he himself should not be aware of it. Then she had her ambitions, too. She had a vague impression that the country at large did not quite understand and appreciate her father; that the people did not know him as she knew him. How could they, if he were to be for ever forsaking his public duties in order to gad about with a girl just left school? Never before (Yolande was convinced) had the nation such urgent need of his services. There were a great many things wrong which he could put right; of that she had no manner of doubt. The Government were making a tyrannical use of a big majority to go their own way, not heeding the warnings and protests of independent members; this amongst many other things ought to be attended to. And it was at such a time, and just when she had revealed to him her secret aspiration that she might perhaps become his private secretary, that he must needs tell her to pack up, and insist on quitting London

with her. Yolande could not understand it ; but she was a biddable and obedient kind of creature ; and so she took her place in the four-wheeled cab without any word of complaint.

And yet, when once they were really on their way from London—when the railway-carriage was fairly out of the station—her father's manner seemed to gain so much in cheerfulness that she could hardly be sorry they had left. She had not noticed that he had been more anxious and nervous that morning than usual ; but she could not fail to remark how much brighter his look was now they were out in the clearer air. And when Yolande saw her father's eyes light up like this—as they did occasionally—she was apt to forget about the injury that was being done to the affairs of the Empire. They had been much together, these two ; and anything appertaining to him was of keen interest to her ; whereas the country at large was something of an abstraction ; and the mechanical majority of the Government—for which she had a certain measure of contempt—little more than a name.

"Yolande," said he (they had the compart-

ment to themselves), “ I had a talk with John Shortlands last night.”

“ Yes, papa ? ”

“ And if England slept well from that time until this morning it was because she little knew the fate in store for her. Think of this, child ; I half threatened to throw up my place in Parliament altogether—letting the country go to the mischief if it liked ; and then the arrangement would be that you and I, Yolande—now just consider this—that you and I should start away together, and roam all over the world, looking at everything, and amusing ourselves—going just where we liked —no one to interfere with us—you and I all by ourselves—now, Yolande ! ”

She had clasped her hands with a quick delight.

“ Oh, papa, that would indeed——”

But she stopped ; and instantly her face grew grave again.

“ Oh no,” she said, “ no ; it would not do. Last night, papa, you were reproachful of me——”

“ ‘ Reproachful of me ! ’ ” he repeated, mockingly.

"Reproachful to me?" she said, with inquiring eyes. But he himself was not ready with the correct phrase; and so she went on: "Last night you were reproachful that I had taken up so much of your time; and though it was all in fun, still it was true; and now I am no longer a schoolgirl; and I wish to help you if I can, and not be merely tiresome and an encumbrance——"

"You are so much of an encumbrance, Yolande!" he said, with a laugh.

"Yes," she said, gravely; "you would tire of me if we went away like that. In time you would tire. One would tire of always being amused; all the people that we see have work to do; and some day—it might be a long time—but some day you would think of Parliament, and you would think you had given it up for me——"

"Don't make such a mistake!" said he. "Do not consider yourself of such importance, Miss. If I threw over Slagpool, and started as a Wandering Jew—I mean we should be two Wandering Jews, you know, Yolande—it would be quite as much on my own account as yours——"

" You would become tired of being amused. You could not always travel," she said. She put her hand on his hand. " Ah, I see what it is," she said, with a little laugh. " You are concealing. That is your kindness, papa. You think I am too much alone ; it is not enough that you sacrifice to-day, to-morrow, next day, to me ; you wish to make a sacrifice altogether ; and you pretend you are tired of politics. But you cannot make me blind to it. I see—oh, quite clearly I can see through your pretence ! "

He was scarcely listening to her now.

" I suppose," he said, absently, " it is one of those fine things that are too fine ever to become true. Fancy now—the two of us just wandering away wherever we pleased—resting a day, a week, a month, when we came to some beautiful place—all by ourselves in the wide world."

" I have often noticed that, papa," she said, " that you like to talk about being away —about being remote——"

" But we should not be like the Wandering Jew in one respect," he said, almost to himself. " The years would tell. There

would be a difference. Something might happen to one of us."

And then, apparently a new suggestion entered his mind. He glanced at the girl opposite him—timidly and anxiously.

"Yolande," said he, "I—I wonder now—I suppose at your age—well, have you ever thought of getting married?"

She looked up at him with her clear, frank eyes, and when she was startled like that her mouth had the slight pathetic droop, already noticed, that made her face so sensitive and charming.

"Why, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times!" she exclaimed, still with the soft clear eyes wondering.

His eyes were turned away. He appeared to attach no importance to this confession.

"Of course," she said, "when I say I have thought hundreds of times of getting married it is about not getting married that I mean. No. That is my resolution. Oh, many a time I have said that to myself. I shall not marry—never—no one."

In spite of himself his face suddenly

brightened up ; and it was quite cheerfully that he went on to say—

“Oh, but, Yolande, that is absurd. Of course you will marry. Of course you must marry.”

“When you put me away, papa.”

“When I put you away !” he repeated, with a laugh.

“Yes,” she continued, quite simply. “That was what Madame used to say. She used to say ‘If your papa marries again, that is what you must expect. It will be better for you to leave the house. But your papa is rich ; you will have a good portion ; then you will find some one to marry you, and give you also an establishment.’ ‘Very well,’ I said, ‘but that is going too far, Madame ; and until my papa tells me to go away from him I shall not go away, and there is not any necessity that I shall marry any one.’ ”

“I wish Madame had minded her own affairs,” Mr. Winterbourne said, angrily. “I am not likely to marry again. I shall not marry again. Put that out of your head, Yolande—at once, and for always. But as for you—well, don’t you see, child—I—I can’t live for ever ; and you have got no very near

relatives ; and besides, living with relatives isn't always the pleasantest of things ; and I should like to see your future quite settled. I should like to know that—that——”

“ My future ! ” Yolande said, with a light laugh. “ No, I will have nothing to do with a future ; is not the present very good ? Look—here I am ; I have you ; we are going out together, to have walks, rides, boating : is it not enough ? Do I want any stranger to come in to interfere ? No ; some day you will say ‘ Yolande, you worry me. You stop my work. Now I am going to attend to Parliament ; and you have got to marry ; and go off ; and not worry me.’ Very well. It is enough. What I shall say is this : Papa, choose for me. What do I know ? I do not know, and I do not care. Only a few things are necessary — are quite entirely necessary. He must not talk all day long about horses. And he must be in Parliament. And he must be on your side in Parliament. How much is that — three ? — three qualifications. That is all.”

Indeed, he found it was no use trying to talk to her seriously about this matter. She

laughed it aside. She did not believe there was any fear about her future. She was well content with the world as it existed ; was not the day fine enough, and Weybridge, and Chertsey, and Esher, and Moulsey all awaiting them ? If her father would leave his Parliamentary duties to look after themselves, she was resolved to make the most of the holiday.

“ Oh, but you don’t know,” said he, quite falling in with her mood, “ you don’t know Yolande, one fifteenth part of what is in store for you. I don’t believe you have the faintest idea why I am going down to Oatlands at this minute.”

“ Well, I don’t, papa,” she said, “ except through a madness of kindness.”

“ Would it surprise you if I asked Mrs. Graham to take you with them for that sail to Suez or Aden ?”

She threw up her hands in affright.

“ Alone ?” she exclaimed. “ To go away alone with strangers ?”

“ Oh no ; I should be going also—of course.”

“ But the time——”

"I should be back for the Budget. Yolande," said he, gravely, "I am convinced—I am seriously convinced—that no one should be allowed to sit in Parliament who has not visited Gibraltar, and the island of Malta, and such places, and seen how the Empire is held together, and what our foreign possessions are——"

"It is only an excuse, papa—it is only an excuse to give me another holiday!——"

"Be quiet. I tell you the country ought to compel its legislators to go out in batches—paying the expenses of the poorer ones, of course—and see for themselves what our soldiers and sailors are doing for us. I am certain that I have no right to sit in Parliament until I have visited the fortifications of Malta and inspected the Suez Canal."

"Oh, if it is absolutely necessary," Yolande said, with a similar gravity.

"It is absolutely necessary. I have long felt it to be so. I feel it is a duty to my country that we should personally examine Malta."

"Very well, papa," said Yolande, who was so pleased to find her father in such good

humour that she forbore to protest, even though she was vaguely aware that the confidence of the electorate of Slagpool was again being abused in order that she should enjoy another long and idling voyage, with the only companion whom she cared to have with her.

The Grahams were the very first people they saw when they reached Oatlands. Colonel Graham—a tall, stout, grizzled, good-natured-looking man—was lying back in a garden-seat, smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper ; while his wife was standing close by, calling to her baby, which plump small person was vainly trying to walk to her, under the guidance of an ayah, whose dusky skin and silver ornaments and flowing garments of Indian red looked picturesque enough on an English lawn. Mrs. Graham was a pretty woman, of middle height, with a pale face, a square forehead, short hair inclined to curl, and dark gray eyes with black eyelashes, and black eyebrows. But along with her prettiness, which was only moderate, she had an exceedingly fascinating manner, and a style that was at least attract-

ive to men. Women, especially when they found themselves deserted, did not like her style ; they said there was rather too much of it ; they said it savoured of the garrison-flirt, and was obviously an importation from India ; and they thought she talked too much, and laughed too much, and altogether had too little of the dignity of a matron. No doubt they would have hinted something about the obscurity of her birth and parentage, had that been possible. But it was not possible ; for everybody knew that when Colonel Graham married her, as his second wife, she was the only daughter of Lord Lynn, who was the thirteenth baron of that name in the peerage of Scotland.

Now this pretty, pale-faced, gray-eyed woman professed herself overjoyed when Mr. Winterbourne said there was a chance of his daughter and himself joining her and her husband on their suggested P. and O. trip ; but the lazy, good-humoured-looking soldier glanced up from his paper and said—

“Look here, Polly, it’s too absurd. What would people say ! It’s all very well for you and me ; we are old Indians and don’t mind ;

but if Mr. Winterbourne is coming with us—and you, Miss Winterbourne—we must do something more reasonable and Christian-like than sail out to Suez or Aden and back, all for nothing."

"But nothing could suit us better!" Yolande's father said—indeed, he did not mind where or why he went, so long as he got away from England, and Yolande with him.

"Oh, but we must do something," Colonel Graham said. "Look here. When we were at Peshawur a young fellow came up there—you remember young Ismat, Polly?—well, I was of some little assistance to him; and he said any time we wanted to see something of the Nile I could have his father's dahabeeyah—or rather one of them, for his father is Governor of Merhadj, and a bit of a swell, I fancy. There you are, now. That would be something to do. People wouldn't think we were idiots. We could have our sail all the same to Suez, and see the old faces at Gib. and Malta; then we could have a skim up the Nile a bit—and by the way, we shall have it all to ourselves just now——"

"The very thing!" exclaimed Mr. Winterbourne, eagerly, for his imagination seemed easily captured by the suggestion of anything remote. "Nothing could be more admirable. Yolande, what do you say?"

Yolande's face was sufficient answer.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Graham, in an awful whisper, "have you got a Levinge?"

"A what?" said Yolande.

"You have not? And you might have gone to Egypt at this time of the year, without a Levinge!"

"What are you talking about the time of the year, Polly!" her husband cried peevishly. "It is the only time of the year that the Nile is tolerable. It is no longer a Cockney route. You have the whole place to yourself—at least, so Ismat Effendi assured me; and if he has given me a wrong tip, wait till I get hold of him by the nape of his Egyptian neck. And you needn't frighten Miss Yolande about mosquitoes or any of the other creatures of darkness; for you've only to get her one of those shroud things—"

"Just what I was saying!" his wife protested.

Indeed, she seemed greatly pleased about this project ; and when they went in to lunch, they had a table to themselves, so as to secure a full and free discussion of plans. Mrs. Graham talked in the most motherly way to Yolande ; and petted her. She declared that those voyages to America, of which Yolande had told her, had nothing of the charm and variety and picturesqueness of the sail along the African shores. Yolande would be delighted with it ; with the people on board ; with the ports they would call at ; with the blue of the Mediterranean Sea. It was all a wonder, as she described it.

But she was a shrewd - headed little woman. Very soon after lunch she found an opportunity of talking with her husband alone.

"I think Yolande Winterbourne prettier and prettier the longer I see her," she said, carelessly.

"She's a good-looking girl. You'll have to look out, Polly. You won't have the whole ship waiting on you this time."

"And very rich — quite an heiress, they say."

"I suppose Winterbourne is pretty well off."

"He himself has nothing to do with the firm now, I suppose."

"I think not."

"Besides, making engines is quite respectable. Nobody could complain of that."

"I shouldn't, if it brought me in £15,000 or £20,000 a year," her husband said, grimly. "I'd precious soon have Inverstronan added on to Inverstroy."

"Oh," she said, blithely, "talking about the north, I haven't heard from Archie for a long time. I wonder what he is about—watching the nesting of the grouse, I suppose. I say, Jim, I wish you'd let me ask him to go with us. It's rather dull for him up there; my father isn't easy to live with. May I ask him?"

She spoke very prettily and pleadingly.

"He'll have to pay his own fare to Suez and back, then," her husband answered, rather roughly.

"Oh yes; why not?" she said, with great innocence: "I am sure poor Archie is always willing to pay when he can; and I

do wish my father would be a little more liberal. I am sure he might. Every inch of shooting and fishing was let last year!—even the couple of hundred yards along the river that Archie always has had for himself. I don't believe he threw a fly last year——”

“ He did on the Stroy,” her husband said, gloomily.

“ That was because you were so awfully good to him,” said his wife, in her sweetest manner. “ And you can be awfully good to people, Jim, when you don't let the black bear ride on your shoulders.”

Then Mrs. Graham, smoothing her pretty short curls, and with much pleasure visible in the pretty dark gray eyes, went to her own room and sat down, and wrote as follows:—

“ DEAR ARCHIE—Jim's good nature is beyond anything. We are going to have a look at Gib. again, and at Malta, just for auld lang syne; and then Jim talks of taking us up the Nile a bit; and he says you ought to go with us, and you will only have to pay

your passage to Suez and back—which you could easily save out of your hats and boots if you would only be a little less extravagant, and get them in Inverness instead of in London. Mr. Winterbourne, the member for Slagpool, is going with us; and he and Jim will halve the expenses of the Nile voyage. Mr. Winterbourne's daughter makes up the party. She is rather nice, I think; but only a child. Let me know at once. There is a P. and O. on the 17th—I think we shall catch that; Jim and the captain are old friends.—Your loving sister,

“POLLY.”

She folded up the letter; put it in an envelope; and addressed it so—

The Hon. the Master of Lynn,
Lynn Towers,
by Inverness, N.B.

CHAPTER IV.

A FAREWELL TO ENGLAND.

A VOYAGE in a P. and O. steamer is so familiar a matter to thousands of English readers that very little need be said about it here in detail, except, indeed, in so far as this particular voyage affected the fortunes of these one or two people. And Yolande's personal experiences began early. The usual small crowd of passengers was assembled in Liverpool Street Station—hurrying, talking, laughing, and scanning possible ship-companions with an eager curiosity ; and in the midst of them, Yolande, for a wonder—her father having gone to look after some luggage—found herself for the moment alone. A woman came into this wide, hollow-resounding station, and timidly and yet anxiously scanned the faces of the various people who were on the platform adjoining the special train. She was a respectably dressed person,

apparently a mechanic's wife; but her features bore the marks of recent crying—they were all “*begrutten*,” as the Scotch say. She carried a small basket. After an anxious scrutiny—but it was only the women she regarded—she went up to Yolande.

“I beg your pardon, Miss,” she said—but she could say no more, for her face was tremulous.

Yolande looked at her; thought she was drunk; and turned away rather frightened.

“I beg your pardon, Miss”—And with that her trembling hands opened the basket, which was filled with flowers.

“No, thank you; I don't want any,” said Yolande, civilly. But there was something in the woman's imploring eyes that said something to her. She was startled; and stood still.

“Are—are you going farther than Gibraltar, Miss?”

“Yes. Yes, I think so,” said Yolande, wondering.

There were tears running down the woman's face. For a second or two she tried to speak, ineffectually; then she said—

"Two days out from—from Gibraltar—would you be so kind, Miss, as to put—these flowers—on the water?—My little girl was buried at sea—two days out——"

"Oh, I understand you," said Yolande, quickly—with a big lump in her throat. "Oh yes, I will! I am so sorry for you——"

She took the basket. The woman burst out crying; and hid her face in her hands; and then turned to go away. She was so distracted with her grief that she had forgotten even to say "Thank you." At the same moment Mr. Winterbourne came up—hastily and angrily.

"What is this?"

"Hush, papa! The poor woman had a little girl buried at sea—these are some flowers——"

Yolande went quickly after her, and touched her on the shoulder.

"Tell me," she said, "what was your daughter's name?"

The woman raised her tear-stained face.

"Jane. We called her Janie; she was only three years old; she would have been ten by now. You won't forget, Miss—it

was—it was two days beyond Gibraltar that—that we buried her——”

“ Oh no ; do you think I could forget ? ” Yolande said ; and she offered her hand. The woman took her hand, and pressed it ; and said, “ God bless you, Miss—I thought I could trust your face ; ” then she hurried away.

Yolande went back to her father, who, though closely watching her, was standing with the Grahams ; and she told them (with her own eyes a little bit moist) of the mission with which she had been entrusted ; but neither she nor they thought of asking why, out of all the people about to go down by the steamer train, this poor woman should have picked out Yolande as the one by whom she would like to have those flowers strewn on her child’s ocean grave. Perhaps there was something in the girl’s face that assured the mother that she was not likely to forget.

And at last the crowd began to resolve itself into those who were going and those who were remaining behind ; the former establishing themselves in the compartments, the latter talking all the more eagerly as the

time grew shorter. And Mrs. Graham was in despair because of the non-appearance of her brother.

"There," she said to her husband, as the door of the carriage was finally locked, and the train began to move out of the station, "I told you. I told you I should not be surprised. It is just like him—always wanting to be too clever. Well, his coolness has cost him something this time. I told you I should not at all be surprised if he missed the train altogether."

"I don't think the Master's finances are likely to run to a special," her husband said, good-humouredly.

"Oh, it is too provoking!" exclaimed the pretty young matron (but, with all her anger, she did not forget to smooth her tightly fitting costume as she settled into her seat). "It is too provoking! I left Baby at home more on his account than on any one else's. If there was the slightest sound, I knew he would declare that Baby had been crying all the night through. There never was a better baby—never! Now, was there ever, Jim?"

"Well, I can't answer for all the babies that ever were in the world," her husband said, in his easy, good-natured way; "but it is a good enough baby, as babies go!"

"It is the very best-tempered baby I ever saw or heard of," she said, emphatically; and she turned to Yolande. "Just think, dear, of my leaving Baby in England for two whole months, and mostly because I knew my brother would complain. And now he goes and misses the train—through laziness, or indifference, or wanting to be too sharp—"

"I should think that Baby would be much better off on land than on board ship," said Yolande, with a smile.

"Of course, Miss Winterbourne," the Colonel said. "You're quite right. A baby on board a ship is a nuisance."

"Jim! You don't deserve——"

"And there's another thing," continued the stout and grizzled soldier, with the most stolid composure. "I've seen it often on board ship. I know what happens. If the mother of the baby is old or ugly, it's all right; the baby is let alone. But if she's

young and good-looking, it's wonderful how the young fellows begin and pet the baby, and feed it up on toffy and oranges. What do they know? Hang 'em, they'd fetch up pastry from the saloon and give it to a two-year-old. That aint good for a baby."

"Poor Archie!" said his wife, rather inconsequently, "it will be such a disappointment for him."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Colonel Graham, "I believe he has never heard that the P. and O. ships don't stop at Southampton now. Never mind, Polly; he can go overland, if he wants to catch us up at Cairo."

"And miss the whole voyage!" she exclaimed, aghast. "And forfeit his passage-money? Fancy the cost of the railway journey to Brindisi!"

"Well, if people will miss trains, they must pay the penalty," her husband remarked, quietly; and there was an end of that.

At Tilbury there was the usual scramble of getting the luggage transferred to the noisy little tender; and the natural curiosity with which every one was eager to scan the

great and stately vessel which was to be their floating home for many a day. And here there was a surprise for at least one of the party. When, after long delays, and after a hurried steaming out into the river, the tender was drawing near the side of the huge steamer, of course all eyes were turned to the decks above, where the picturesque costumes of the Lascar crew were the most conspicuous points of colour. But there were obviously a number of other people on board, besides the dusky crew and their English officers.

"There he is, I can make him out," observed Colonel Graham.

"Who?" his wife asked.

"Why, the Master of Lynn," he answered, coolly.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, in either real or affected anger. "Shan't I give it him! To think of his causing us all this disquietude!"

"Speak for yourself, Polly," her husband said, as he regarded a group of young men who were up on the hurricane-deck, leaning over the rail, and watching the approach of the tender. "I wasn't much put out, was

I? And apparently he hasn't been; for he is smoking a cigar, and chatting to—yes, by Jove! It's Jack Douglas—and young Mackenzie of Sleat—oh, there's Ogilvy's brother-in-law—what do you call him?—the long fellow who broke his leg at Bombay—there's young Fraser, too, eye-glass and all—a regular gathering of the clans—there'll be some Nap going among those boys!"

"I hope you won't let Archie play, then!" his wife said, sharply. But she turned with a charming little smile to Yolande. "You mustn't think my brother is a gambler, you know, dear; but really some of those young officers play far beyond their means, and Archie is very popular amongst them, I am told——"

But by this time everybody was scrambling on to the paddle-boxes of the tender, and from thence ascending to the deck of the steamer. The Master of Lynn was standing by the gangway, awaiting his sister. He was a young man of four or five and twenty, slim, well built, with a pale, olive complexion, and a perfectly clean-shaven face; and he had the square forehead, the well-marked

eyebrows, and the pleasant gray eyes with dark eyelashes that his sister had. But he had not her half-curly hair; for his was shorn bare, in soldier fashion—though he was not a soldier.

"How are you, Graham? How are you, Polly?" said he.

"Well, I like your coolness!" his sister said, angrily. "Why were you not at the station? Why did you not tell us? Of course we thought you had missed the train! I wish you would take the trouble to let people know what you are about. Let me introduce you to Miss Winterbourne. Yolande, dear, this is my brother Archie—Mr. Winterbourne, my brother, Mr. Leslie. Well, now, what have you to say for yourself?"

He had thrown away his cigar.

"Not much," said he, smiling good-naturedly, and taking some wraps and things from her which her husband had selfishly allowed her to carry. "I went down to see some fellows at Chatham last night; and of course I stayed there and came over in the morning. Sorry I vexed you. You see,

Miss Winterbourne, my sister likes platform parade ; she likes to have people round her for half-an-hour before the train starts ; and she likes to walk up and down, for it shows off her figure and her dress ; isn't that so, Polly ? But you hadn't half your display this morning, apparently. Where's Baby ? Where's Ayah ? "

" You know very well. You would have been grumbling all the time if I had brought Baby——"

" Well," said he, looking rather aghast, "if you've left Baby behind on my account, I shall have a pleasant time of it. I don't believe you. But tell me the number of your cabin, and I'll take these things down for you. I'm on the spar-deck, thank goodness."

" Miss Winterbourne's cabin is next to mine ; so you can take her things down too."

" No, thank you," said Yolande, who was looking out for her luggage (her maid being in a hopeless state of bewilderment), and who had nothing in her hand but the little basket. " I will take this down myself, by and by."

There was a great bustle and confusion on board ; friends giving farewell messages ;

passengers seeking out their cabins; the bare-armed and bare-footed Lascars, with their blue blouses and red turbans, hoisting luggage on to their shoulders and carrying it along the passages. Mr. Winterbourne was impatient.

"I hate this—this confusion and noise," he said.

"But, papa," said Yolande, "I know your things as well as my own. Jane and I will see to them when they come on board. Please go away and get some lunch—please! Everything will be quiet in a little while."

"I wish we were off," he said, in the same impatient way. "This delay is quite unnecessary. It is always the same. We ought to have started before now. Why doesn't the captain order the ship to be cleared?"

"Papa, dear, do go and get places at the table. The Grahams have gone below. And have something very nice waiting for me. See, there comes your other portmanteau, now; and there is only the topee-box, and I know it because I put a bit of red silk on the handle. Papa, do go down and get us comfortable places—I will come as soon as I have

sent your topee-box to your cabin. I suppose we shall be near the Grahams."

"Oh, I know where Mrs. Graham will be," her father said peevishly. "She will be next the captain. She is the sort of woman who always sits next the captain."

"Then the captain is very lucky, papa," said Yolande, mildly ; "for she is exceedingly nice; and she has been exceedingly kind to me."

"I suppose the day will come when this captain, or any other captain, would be just as glad to have you sit next him," he said.

"Papa," she said, with a smile, "are you jealous of Mrs. Graham for my sake? I am sure I do not wish to sit next the captain; I have not even seen him yet that I know of."

But this delay, necessary or unnecessary, made him irritable and anxious. He would not go to the saloon until he had seen all the luggage—both his and Yolande's—despatched to their respective cabins. Then he began to inquire why the ship did not start? Why were the strangers not packed off on board the tender and sent ashore? Why did the chief officer allow these boats to be hanging about? The agent of the company had no

right to be standing talking on deck two hours after the ship was timed to sail.

Meanwhile Yolande stole away to her own cabin, and carefully, and religiously—and, indeed, with a little choking in the throat—opened the little basket that held the flowers, to see whether they might not be the better for a sprinkling of water. They were rather expensive flowers for a poor woman to have bought; and the damp moss in which they were embedded, and the basket itself also, were more suggestive of Covent Garden than of Whitechapel. Yolande poured some water into the wash-hand basin, and dipped her fingers into it, and very carefully and tenderly sprinkled the flowers over. And then she considered what was likely to be the coolest and safest place in the cabin for them, and hung the basket there, and came out again, shutting the door, involuntarily, with quietness.

She passed through the saloon, and went up on deck. Her father was still there.

“Papa,” said she, “you are a very unnatural person. You are starving me——”

“Haven’t you had lunch, Yolande?” said he, with a sudden compunction.

"No, I have not. Do I ever have lunch without you? I am waiting for you."

"Really this delay is most atrocious!" he said. "What is the use of advertising one hour and sailing at another? There can be no excuse. The tender has gone ashore——"

"Oh, but, papa, they say there is a lady who missed the train, and is coming down by a special——"

"I don't believe a word of it! Why, that is worse. The absurdity of keeping a ship like this waiting for an idiot of a woman!"

"I am so hungry, papa!"

"Well, go down below and get something—if you can. No doubt the gross mismanagement reaches to the saloon tables as well."

She put her hand within his arm, and half drew him along to the companion-way.

"What is the difference of an hour or two," said she, "if we are to be at sea for a fortnight? Perhaps the poor lady who is coming down by the special train has some one ill abroad. And—and besides, papa, I am so very, very, very hungry."

He went down with her to the saloon, and

took his place in silence Yolande sat next to Mrs. Graham, who was very talkative and merry, even though there was no captain in his place to do her honour. Young Archie Leslie was opposite, so was Colonel Graham. They were mostly idling ; but Yolande was hungry, and they were all anxious to help her at once, though the silent dusky stewards knew their duties well enough.

By and by, when they were talking about anything or nothing, it occurred to the young Master of Lynn to say—

“I suppose you don’t know that we are off?”

“No! impossible!” was the general cry.

“Oh, but we are, though. Look!”

Mr. Winterbourne quickly got up and went to one of the ports ; there, undoubtedly, were the river banks slowly, slowly going astern.

He went back to his seat, putting his hand on Yolande’s shoulder as he sat down.

“Yolande,” said he, “do you know that we are off—really and truly going away from England—altogether quit from its shores ?”

His manner had almost instantly changed.

His spirits quickly brightened up. He made himself most agreeable to Mrs. Graham ; and was humorous in his quiet, half-sardonic way ; and was altogether pleased with the appearance and the appointments of the ship. To fancy this great mass of metal moving away like that  and the throbbing of the screw scarcely to be detected !

" You know, my dear Mrs. Graham," he said, presently, " this child of mine is a most economical—even a penurious—creature, and I must depend on you to force her to make proper purchases at the different places—all the kinds of things that women-folk prize, don't you know. Lace, now ; what is the use of being at Malta if you don't buy lace ? And embroideries and things of that kind ; she ought to bring back enough of eastern silks and stuffs to last her a lifetime. And jewellery, too—silver suits her very well ;—she must get plenty of that at Cairo——"

" Oh, you can leave that to my wife," Colonel Graham said, confidently. " She'd buy up the Pyramids if she could take them home. I'm glad it won't be my money."

And this was but one small item of expec-

tation. The voyage before them furnished forth endless hopes and schemes. They all adjourned to the hurricane-deck, and here his mood of contented cheerfulness was still more obvious. He was quite delighted with the cleanliness and order of the ship, and with the courtesy of the captain, and with the smart look of the officers; and he even expressed approval of the pretty, quiet, not romantic scenery of the estuary of the Thames. Yolande was with him. When they walked they walked arm-in-arm. He said he thought the Grahams were likely to be excellent companions; Mrs. Graham was a charming woman; there was a good deal of quiet humour about her husband; the Master of Lynn was a frank-mannered young fellow, with honest eyes. His step grew jaunty. He told Yolande she must, when in Egypt, buy at least half-a-dozen eastern costumes, the more gorgeous the better, so that she should never be at a loss when asked to go to a fancy-dress ball.

And at dinner, too, in the evening it was a delight to Yolande to sit next him and listen to his chuckles and his little jokes. Care

seemed to have left him altogether. The night, when they went on deck again, was dark ; but a dark night pleased him as much as anything. Yolande was walking with him.

And then they sat down with their friends ; and Mrs. Graham had much to talk about. Yolande sat silent. Far away in the darkness a long, thin, dull line of gold was visible ; she had been told that these were the lights of Hastings. It is a strange thing to sail past a country in the night-time, and to think of all the beating human hearts it contains—of the griefs, and despairs, and hushed joys, all hidden away there in the silence. And perhaps Yolande was thinking most of all of the poor mother, whose name she did not know, whom she should never see again, but whose heart she knew right well was heavy that night with its aching sorrow. It was her first actual contact with human misery ; and she could not help thinking of the woman's face. That was terrible, and sad beyond anything that she could have imagined. For indeed her own life so far had been among the roses. As Mrs. Graham had said, she was but a child.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BELL.

"It is really quite wonderful how intimate you become with people on board ship, and how well you get to know them."

This not entirely novel observation was addressed to Yolande by the Master of Lynn ; while these two, with some half-dozen others, were grouped together in the companion-way, where they had taken shelter from the flying seas. The remark was not new ; but he appeared to think it important. He seemed anxious to convince her of its truth.

"It is really quite wonderful," he repeated ; and he regarded the pretty face as if eager to meet with acquiescence there. "On board ship you get to know the characters of people so thoroughly ; you can tell whether the friendship is likely to last after the voyage is over. Balls and dinner parties are of no use ; that is only acquaintanceship ; at sea

you are thrown so much together—you are cut off from the world, you know—there is a kind of fellow-feeling and companionship—that—that is quite different. Why," said he, with his eyes brightening, "it seems absurd to think that the day before yesterday you and I were absolute strangers; and yet here you have been letting me bore you for hours by talking of Lynn and the people there——"

"Oh, I assure you I am very grateful," said Yolande, with much sincerity. "But for you I should have been quite alone."

The fact is, they had encountered a heavy two-days' gale outside the Bay of Biscay and south of that; and as the ship was a pretty bad roller, sad havoc was wrought among the passengers. Mrs. Graham had disappeared from the outset. Her husband was occasionally visible; but he was a heavy man, and did not like being knocked about, so he remained mostly in the saloon. Mr. Winterbourne was a good enough sailor, but the noises at night—he had a spar-deck cabin—kept him awake, and he spent the best part of the daytime in his berth, trying to get fitful snatches of sleep. Accordingly, Yolande,

who wanted to see the sights of the storm, betook herself to the companion-way, where she would have been entirely among strangers (being somewhat reserved in her walk and conversation) had it not been for Mr. Leslie. He, indeed, proved himself to be a most agreeable companion — modest, assiduously attentive, good-natured and talkative, and very respectful. He was entirely governed by her wishes. He brought her the news of the ship when it was not every one who would venture along the deck, dodging the heavy seas. He got her the best corner in this companion-way and the most comfortable of the chairs ; and he had rugs for her, and a book, only that she was far too much interested in what was going on around her to read. Once or twice, when she would stand by the door, he even ventured to put his hand on her arm—afraid lest she should be overbalanced and thrown out on the swimming decks. For there was a kind of excitement amid this roar and crash of wind and water. Who could decide which was the grander spectacle—that great mass of driven and tossing and seething silver that

went out and out until it met a wall of black cloud at the horizon, or the view from the other side of the vessel (with one's back to the sunlight)—the mountains of blue rolling by, and their crests so torn by the gale that the foam ended in a rainbow flourish of orange and red?

"They say she is rolling 84 degrees 'out and out,'" said Archie Leslie.

"Oh, indeed," said Yolande, looking grave.
"But I don't quite know what that means."

"Neither do I," said he; "but it sounds well. What I do know is that you won't see my sister until we get to Gib. You seem to be a capital sailor, Miss Winterbourne."

"I have often had to be ashamed of it," said Yolande. "To-day, also—there was no other lady at the table—oh, I cannot sit alone like that any more—no, I will rather have no dinner than go and sit alone—it is terrible—and the Captain laughing——"

"Poor fellow, he is not in a laughing mood just now——"

"Why, then? There is no danger?"

"Oh no. But I hear he has had his head

cut open, a chronometer falling on him in his cabin. However, I think he'll show up at dinner; it is only a flesh wound. They've had one of the boats stove in, they say, and some casks carried away, and a good deal of smashing forward. I wonder if your father has got any sleep—I should think not. I'll go and see how he is getting on if you like——”

“Oh no; if he is asleep that is very well. No,” said Yolande; “I wish you to tell me more about your friend—the gentleman who was your tutor; that is a very strange life for any one to live.”

What she wished was enough for him.

“I have not told you the strangest part of the story,” said he, “for you would not believe it.”

“Am I so unbelieving?” said she, looking up.

His eyes met hers, but only for an instant. Yolande's eyes were calm, smiling, unconcerned; it was not in them, at all events, that any confusion lay.

“Of course I did not mean that,” said he; “but—but one has one's character for veracity, don't you know—and if I were to

tell you about Mrs. Bell—the story is too improbable——”

“Then it is about Mrs. Bell that I wish to hear,” said Yolande, in her gentle imperious way.

“Besides, I’ve bored you all day long about those people in Inverness-shire. You will think I have never seen any one else, and never been anywhere else. Now I would much rather hear about the Château and the people there. I want you to tell me what you thought of America—after living in that quiet place——”

“What I thought of America!” said Yolande, with a laugh. “That is a question indeed!”

“Isn’t it the question that all Americans ask of you? You have heard enough about the Inverness-shire people. Tell me about Rennes. Have you seen much of Paris? Did you like the Parisians?”

“Ah,” said she, “you are not so obedient to me as my papa is.”

“Fathers in Scotland are made of sterner stuff,” he answered. “We don’t talk that way——”

"Now, listen," she said. "I have the picture before me—everything complete—the lake, and Lynn Towers—the mountains and moorland, also the ravines where the deer take shelter—oh yes, I can see all that quite clear—but the central figure, that is absent."

"The central figure?"

"Mrs. Bell."

He had quite forgotten about that lady; now he laughed.

"Oh no," he said; "Mrs. Bell is not so important as that. She has nothing to do with Lynn. She lives at Gress."

"Well, that is a beginning, at all events," she remarked.

"Oh, but must I really tell you the story? You will try hard to believe?"

"I am not unbelieving."

"Very well, then. I will tell you about Mrs. Bell, for I hope some day you will see her——"

She looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, I am going to ask your father to take a moor up there that I know of; and, of course, you would come to the lodge. If he cares about grouse-shooting, and isn't afraid

of hard work, it is the very place for him. Then you would see my friend Melville—who ought to be Melville of Monaglen by rights—and maybe he will be before Mrs. Bell has done with him."

"Mrs. Bell again? Then I am to hear about her after all?—"

"Very well, then. Mrs. Bell is not Mrs. Bell; but Miss Bell; only they call her "Mrs." because she is an elderly lady, and is rich, and is a substantial and matronly-looking kind of person. Mrs. Bell was cook to the Melvilles—that was years and years ago, before old Mr. Melville died. But she was an ambitious party; and Gress wasn't enough for her. She could read; and it isn't every Highland servant lass who can do that. She read cookery books and made experiments. Now you see the adventures of Mrs. Bell don't make a heroic story—" "

"But I am listening," said Yolande, with a calm air.

"She got to be rather clever, though there was not much chance for her in the Melvilles' house. Then she went to Edinburgh. All this is plain sailing. She got a situation in a

hotel there; then she was allowed to try what she could do in the cooking line; then she was made head cook. That is the end of chapter one; and I suppose you believe me so far. Years went on and Kirsty was earning a good wage; and all that we knew of her was that she used to send small sums of money occasionally to help one or two of the poor people in Gress who had been her neighbours; for she had neither kith nor kin of her own. Then there happened to come to the hotel in Edinburgh an elderly English gentleman who was travelling about for his health; and he was frightfully anxious about his food; and he very much appreciated the cooking at the hotel. He made inquiries. He saw Kirsty, who was by this time a respectable middle-aged woman, getting rather gray. What does the old maniac do but tell her that he has only a few years to live; that the cooking of his food is about the most important thing to him in the world; that he has no near relatives to inherit his property; and that if she will go to Leicestershire and bind herself to remain cook in his house as long as he lived, he would under-

take to leave her every penny he possessed when he died. ‘I will,’ says Kirsty; but she was a wise woman, and she went to the lawyers, and had everything properly settled. Shall I go on, Miss Winterbourne? I don’t think my heroine interests you. I wish you could see old Mrs. Bell——”

“Oh yes, go on. That is not so unbelievable. Of course I believe you, is it necessary to say that?”

Yolande’s calm demeanour was a little bit disturbed at this moment by a scattering of spray around her; but she quickly dried her red-gold hair and the smooth oval of her cheeks.

“What comes after is a good bit stranger,” he continued. “The old gentleman died; only he lived much longer than anybody expected; and Kirsty, at the age of fifty-eight or so, found herself in possession of an income of very near £4000 a year—well, I believe it is more than that now, for the property has increased in value. And now begins what I can’t tell you half well enough—I wish you could hear Mrs. Bell’s own account—I mean of the schemes that people

laid to inveigle her into a marriage. You know she is rather a simple and kindly-hearted woman; but she believes herself to be the very incarnation of shrewdness; and certainly on that one point she showed herself shrewd enough. When my sister reappears on deck again, you say to her 'Kirsty kenned better;' and see if she does not recognise the phrase. Mrs. Bell's description of the various offers of marriage she has had beats anything; but it was always 'Kirsty kenned better.' Yes; and among these was a formal proposal from Lord ——, —I mean the father of the present Lord ——; and that proposal was twice repeated; you know the ——s are awfully poor; and that one was at his wit's end for money. But Kirsty was not to be caught. Among other things, he stipulated that he was to be allowed to spend eight months of the year in London, she remaining either in Leicestershire or in the Highlands, as she pleased. More than that, he even got the Duke of —— to write to Miss Bell, and back up the suit, and promise that, if she would consent, he would himself go down and give her away——"

"The great Duke of ——?" said Yolande, with her eyes a little bit wider.

"Yes; the late Duke. I thought I should astonish you. But I have seen the Duke's letter—it is one of Mrs. Bell's proudest possessions—I have no doubt you will see it for yourself some day. But Kirsty kenned better——"

"What did she do, then?"

"What did she do? She went back to Gress, like a sensible woman. And she is more than sensible; she is remarkably good-natured; and she sought out the son of the old master—that's my friend Melville, you know—and then she tried all her flattery and shrewdness on him, until she got him persuaded that he should live in Gress—he was cadging about for another tutorship at the time—and make a sort of model village of it, and have old Kirsty for his housekeeper. Oh, she's clever enough in her way. She has picked up very good manners; she can hold her own with anybody. Moreover, she manages Melville most beautifully; and he isn't easy to manage. She is always very respectful; and makes him believe he is

doing her a great kindness in spending her money in improving the village, and all that ; but what she really means, of course, is that he should be a kind of small laird in the place that used to belong to his people. And that is what that woman means to do—I know it—I am certain of it. If ever Monaglen comes into the market, she'll snap it up ; she must have a heap saved, besides the original bulk of her property. Sooner or later she'll make Jack Melville ' Melville of Monaglen,' as sure as he's alive."

" You and he are great friends, then ? "

" Oh, he rather sits upon me," the Master of Lynn said, modestly ; " but we are pretty good friends, as things go."

The gale did not abate much that afternoon ; on the contrary, the great ship seemed to be rolling more heavily than ever ; and at one minute a little accident occurred that might have been attended with more serious consequences. Mr. Winterbourne and young Leslie, not being able to reach the smoking-room on account of the seas coming over the bows, had sought shelter on a bench immediately aft of the hurricane deck ; and there,

enveloped in waterproofs, they were trying to keep their cigars alight. Unfortunately, the lashings securing this bench had not been very strong; and at one bad lurch of the vessel—indeed the deck seemed to be at right angles with the water below them—away the whole thing went, spinning down to leeward. Leslie was a smart young fellow; saw what was coming; and before the bench had reached the gunwale, he had with one hand swung himself on to the ladder ascending to the hurricane-deck, while with the other he had seized hold of his companion's coat. Probably, had he not been so quick, the worst that could have happened was that the two of them might have had a thorough sousing in the water surging along the scuppers; but when Yolande heard of the accident, and when Mr. Winterbourne, rather sadly, showed her his waterproof, which had been half torn from his back, she was instantly convinced that young Leslie had saved her father's life.

In consequence she was much less imperious and wilful in her manner all that afternoon; and was even timidly polite to him.

She consented, without a word, to go down to dinner—although, again, she was the only lady at table. And, indeed, dinner that evening was entirely a ludicrous performance. When Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande and young Leslie got to the foot of the companion-stairs, and, with much clinging, prepared to enter the saloon, the first thing they saw before them was a sudden wave of white that left the table and crashed against the walls. The stewards regarded the broken crockery with a ghastly smile, but made no immediate effort to pick up the fragments. The “fiddles” on the table were found to be of no use whatever. When these three sat down they could only make sure of such things as they could keep their fingers upon. Buttressing was of no avail. Plates, tumblers, knives, and forks, broke away, and steeple-chased over the fiddles, until the final smash on the walls brought their career to a close. The din was awful; and Mr. Winterbourne was much too anxious about the objects around him to be able to make his customary little jokes. But they got through it somehow; and the only result of these wild

adventures with rocketing loaves and plates and bottles was that Yolande and the young Master of Lynn seemed to be on more and more friendly and familiar terms. Yolande talked to him as frankly as if he had been her brother.

Next day matters mended considerably ; and the next again broke blue and fair and shining, with an immense number of Mother Cary's chickens skimming along the sunlit waters. Far away in the south the pale line of the African coast was visible. People began to appear on deck who had been hidden for the last couple of days ; Mrs. Graham was up and smiling, in an exceedingly pretty costume. When should they reach Gibraltar ? Who was going ashore ? Were there many "Scorpions" on board ?

Yolande was not much of a politician ; but her father being something of a "Jingo," of course she was a "Jingo" too ; and she was very proud when, towards the afternoon, they drew nearer and nearer to the great gray scarred rock that commands the Mediterranean ; and her heart warmed at the sight of a little red speck on one of the

ramparts—an English sentry keeping guard there. And when they went ashore, and wandered through the streets, she had as much interest in plain Tommy Atkins in his red coat as in any of the more picturesquely clad Spaniards or Arabs she saw there; and when they went into the Alameda to hear the military band play, she knew by a sort of instinct that among the ladies sitting in their cool costumes under the maples and acacias such and such groups were Englishwomen—the wives of the officers, no doubt—and she would have liked to have gone and spoken to them. “Gib.” seemed to her to be a bit of England, and therefore friendly and familiar; she thought the place looked tremendously strong; and she was glad to see such piles of shot and ranged rows of cannon; and she had a sort of gratitude in her heart towards the officers, and the garrison, and even the Englishwomen sitting there, with a tint of sunbrown on their cheeks, but an English look in their eyes. And all this was absurd enough in a young minx who made a fool of English idioms nearly every time she opened her mouth!

What a beautiful night that was as they sailed away from the vast gray Rock. The moon was growing in strength now ; and the heavens were clear. The passengers had begun to form their own little groups ; acquaintanceships had been made ; chairs drawn close together on the deck, in the silence, under the stars. And along there the skylight of the saloon was open ; and there was a yellow glare coming up from below ; also the sound of singing. They were at duets below—two or three young people ; and whether they sung well or ill, the effect was pleasant enough, with the soft murmur of the Mediterranean all around. “O, who will o'er the downs so free”—of course they sang that ; people always do sing that on board ship. Then they sang, “I would that my love could silently,” and many another old familiar air, the while the vessel churned on its way through the unseen waters, and the pale shadows thrown by the moon on the white decks slowly moved with the motion of the vessel. It was a beautiful night.

The Master of Lynn came aft from the

smoking-room, and met his brother-in-law on the way.

"This is better, isn't it?" said Colonel Graham. "This is more like what I shipped for."

"Yes, this is better. Do you know where the Winterbournes are?"

"In the saloon. I have just left them there."

Young Leslie was passing on; but he stopped.

"I say, Graham, I've noticed one thing on board this ship already."

"What?"

"You watch to-morrow, if they're both on deck at the same time. You'll find that Polly has got all the men about her; and Miss Winterbourne all the children. Odd, isn't it?"

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE MEDITERRANEAN.

THEY were indeed cut off from the rest of the world, as they went ploughing their way through these blue Mediterranean seas. Day after day brought its round of amusements ; and always the sun shining on the white decks ; and the soft winds blowing ; and now and again a swallow, or dove, or quail, or some such herald from unknown coasts, taking refuge for a while in the rigging or fluttering along by the vessel's side. There was an amateur photographer on board, moreover ; and many were the groups that were formed and taken ; only it was observed that when the officers were included the captain generally managed to have Yolande standing on the bridge beside him—a piece of favouritism that broke through all rules and regulations. There was a good deal of “ Bull ” played ; and it was wonderful how, when Mrs. Graham

was playing, there always happened to be a number of those young Highland officers about, ready to pick up her quoits for her. And always, but especially on the bright and breezy forenoons, there was the constitutional tramp up and down the long hurricane deck —an occupation of which Yolande was particularly fond, and in which she found no one could keep up with her so untiringly as the Master of Lynn. She was just as well pleased, however, when she was alone; for then she sang to herself, and had greater freedom in flinging her arms about.

"Look at her," her father said, one morning, to Mrs. Graham—concealing his admiration under an air of chagrin. "Wouldn't you think she was an octopus, or a windmill, or something like that?"

"I call it a rattling good style of walking," said Colonel Graham, interposing. "Elbows in, palms out. She is a remarkably well-made young woman—that's my opinion——"

"But she isn't an octopus," her father said, peevishly.

"Oh, that is merely an excess of vitality," her champion said. "Look how springy her

walk is! I don't believe her heel ever touches the deck—all her walking is done with the front part of her foot. Gad! it's infectious," continued the Colonel, with a grim laugh. "I caught myself trying it when I was walking with her yesterday. But it ain't easy at fifteen stone."

"She need not make herself ridiculous," her father said.

"Ridiculous? I think it's jolly to look at her. Makes one feel young again. She don't know that a lot of old fogies are watching her. Bet a sovereign she's talking about dancing. Archie's devilish fond of dancing—so he ought to be at his time of life. They say they're going to give us a ball to-night—on deck."

Pretty Mrs. Graham was a trifle impatient. There were none of the young officers about, for a wonder; they had gone to have their after-breakfast cigar in the smoking-room—and perhaps a little game of Nap, therewithal. This study of Yolande's appearance had lasted long enough, in her opinion.

"It is clever of her to wear nothing on

her head," she said, as she took up a book, and arranged herself in her chair. "Her hair is her best feature."

But what Yolande and her companion, young Leslie, were talking about, as they marched up and down the long white decks—occasionally stopping to listen to a small group of Lascars, who were chanting a monotonous sing-song refrain—had nothing in the world to do with dancing.

"You think, then, I ought to speak to your father about the moor? Would you like it?" said he.

"I?" she said. "That is nothing. If my papa and I are together, it is not any difference to me where we are. But if it is so wild and remote, that is what my papa will like."

"Remote!" said he, with a laugh. "It is fourteen miles away from anywhere. I like to hear those idiots talking who say the Highlands are overrun with tourists. Much they know about the Highlands. Well, now they've got the railway to Oban, I suppose Oban is pretty bad. But this place that I am telling you of—why you would not see a

strange face from one year's end to the other!"

"Oh, that will exactly suit my papa—exactly," she said with a smile. "Is it very, *very* far away from everything and every one?"

"Isn't it!" he said, grimly. "Why, it's up near the sky, to begin with. I should say the average would be near three thousand feet above the level of the sea. And as for remoteness—well, perhaps Kingussie is not more than fourteen miles off as the crow flies; but then you've got the Monalea mountains between it and you; and the Monalea mountains are not exactly the sort of place that a couple of old ladies would like to climb in search of wild flowers. You see, that is the serious part of it for you, Miss Winterbourne. Fancy the change between the temperature of the Nile and that high moorland——"

"Oh, that is nothing," she said. "So long as I am out of doors, the heat or the cold is to me nothing—nothing at all."

"The other change," he continued, "I have no doubt would be striking enough—

from the busy population of Egypt to the solitude of Allt-nam-ba——”

“ What is it ? Allt——”

“ Allt-nam-ba. It means the Stream of the Cows, though there are no cows there now. They have some strange names there —left by the people who have gone away. I suppose people did live there once ; though what they lived on I can’t imagine. They have left names, anyway ; some of them simple enough—the Fair Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Glen of the Horses, the Glen of the Gray Loch, and so forth—but some of them I can’t make out at all. One is the Glen of the Tombstone ; and I have searched it, and never could find any trace of a Tombstone. One is the Cairn of the Wanderers ; and they must have wandered a good bit before they got up there. Then there is a burn that is called the stream of the Fairies—*Uisge nan Sithean*—that is simple enough ; but there is another place that is called Black Fairies. Now who on earth ever heard of black fairies ?——”

“ But it is not a frightful place ? ” she said. “ It is not terrible—gloomy ? ”

"Not a bit!" said he. "These are only names. No one knows how they came there—that is all. Gloomy? I think the strath from the foot of the moor down to our place is one of the prettiest straths in Scotland."

"Then I should see Lynn Towers?" she said.

"Oh yes—it isn't much of a building, you know——"

"And Mr. Melville of Monaglen—that would be interesting to me——"

"Oh yes," said he; "but—but I wouldn't call him Monaglen—do you see—he hasn't got Monaglen—perhaps he may have it back some day."

"And you," she said, turning her clear eyes towards him,—"sometimes they call you Master—is it right?"

He smiled.

"Oh, that is a formal title—in Scotland. Colonel Graham makes a little joke of it—I suppose that is what you have heard——"

"I must not call you so?"

"Oh no,"—and then he said, with a laugh: "You may call me anything you like —what's the odds? If you want to please

my brother-in-law you should call him Inverstroy."

"But how can I remember?" she said, holding up her fingers and counting. "Not Monaglen. Not Master. But yes, Inverstroy. And Mrs. Bell—shall I see her?"

"Certainly, if you go there."

"And the mill-wheels, and the electric lamps, and all the strange things?"

"Oh yes, if Jack Melville takes a fancy to you. He doesn't to everybody."

"Oh, I am not anxious," she said, with a little dignity. "I do not care much about such things. It is no matter to me."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times!" he said, with much earnestness. "Really, I was not thinking of what I was saying. I was thinking of Jack Melville's ways. Of course he'll be delighted to show you everything—he will be perfectly delighted. He is awfully courteous to strangers. He will be quite delighted to show you the whole of his instruments and apparatus."

"It is very obliging," she said, with something of coldness, "but there is no need that I shall be indebted to Mr. Melville——"

"*Not of Monaglen*—" he said, demurely.

"Of Monaglen, or not of Monaglen," she said, with high indifference. "Come, shall we go and find my papa, and tell him about the wild, far place, and the Stream of the Fairies?"

"No, wait a moment, Miss Winterbourne," said he, with a touch of embarrassment. "You see, that shooting belongs to my father. And I look after the letting of our shootings and fishings when I am at home; though of course we have an agent. Now—now—I don't quite like taking advantage of a new friendship to—to—make such a suggestion—I mean I would rather sink the shop. Perhaps your father might get some other shooting up there——"

"But not with the Glen of the Black Fairies, and the strath, and Lynn Towers near the loch where the char are, and all that you have told me. No; if I am not to see Mrs. Bell—if I am not to see"—She was going to say Mr. Melville of Monaglen, but she waved that aside with a gesture of petulance—"No, I wish to see all that you have told me about; and I think it would be pleasant if we were neighbours."

"You really must have neighbours," said he, eagerly, "in a place like that! That is one thing certain. I am sure we should try to make it as pleasant for you as possible. I am sure my father would. And Polly would be up sometimes—I mean Mrs. Graham. Oh, I assure you, if it was any other shooting than Allt-nam-ba I should be very anxious that you and your father should come and take it. Of course, the lodge is not a grand place——"

"We will go and talk about it now," she said, "to my papa; and you can explain."

Now, as it turned out, although Mr. Winterbourne was rather staggered at first by Yolande's wild project of suddenly changing the idle luxuries of a Nile voyage for the severities of a moorland home in the north, there was something in the notion that attracted him. He began to make inquiries. The solitariness, the remoteness of the place seemed to strike him. Then 1050 brace of grouse, a few black game, a large number of mountain hares, and six stags, was a good return for nine weeks' shooting; and the last tenant had not had experts with him.

Could Yolande have a piano or a harmonium sent to her away in that wilderness?—anything to break the silence of the hills. And Mr. Winterbourne was unlike most people who are contemplating the renting of a moor; the cost of it was the point about which he thought least. But to be away up there—with Yolande—

“Of course it is just possible that the place may have been let since I left,” the Master of Lynn said. “We have not had it vacant for many years back. But that could easily be ascertained at Malta by telegram.”

“You think you would like the place, Yolande?” her father said.

“I think so; yes.”

“You would not die of cold?”

“Not willingly, papa—I mean I would try not—I am not afraid. You must go somewhere, papa; there is no Parliament then; you are fond of shooting; and there will be many days, not with shooting, for you and me to wander in the mountains. I think that will be nice.”

“Very well. I will take the place, Mr. Leslie, if it is still vacant; and I hope we

shall be good neighbours ; and if you can send us a deer or two occasionally into the ravines you speak of, we shall be much obliged to you. And now about dogs—and gillies—and ponies——”

But this proved to be an endless subject of talk between these two, both then and thereafter ; and so Yolande stole away to look after her own affairs. Amongst other things she got hold of the purser, and talked so coaxingly to him that he went and ordered the cook to make two sheets of toffee instead of one—and all of white sugar ; so that when Yolande subsequently held her afternoon levée among the children of the steerage passengers she was provided with sweetstuff enough to make the hearts of the mothers quake with fear.

It was that evening that she had to put the flowers overboard—on the wide and sad and uncertain grave. She did not wish any one to see her, somehow ; she could not make it a public ceremony—this compliance with the pathetic, futile wishes of the poor mother. She had most carefully kept the flowers sprinkled with water, and, despite of

that, they had got sadly faded and shrivelled ; but she had purchased another basketful at Gibraltar, and these were fresh enough. What mattered ? The time was too vague ; the vessel's course too uncertain ; the trifles of flowers would soon be swallowed up in the solitary sea. But it was the remembrance of the mother she was thinking of.

She chose a moment when every one was down below at dinner, and the deck was quite deserted. She took the two little baskets to the rail ; and there, very slowly and reverently, she took out handful after handful of the flowers and dropped them down on the waves, and watched them go floating and floating out and out on the swaying waters. The tears were running down her face ; and she had forgotten whether there was anybody by or not. She was thinking of the poor woman in England. Would she know ? Could she see ? Was she sure that her request would not be forgotten ? And indeed she had not gone so far wrong when she had trusted to the look of Yolande's face.

Then, fearing her absence might be noticed, she went quickly to her cabin, bathed

her eyes in cold water, and then went below—where she found the little coterie at their end of the table all much exercised about Mr. Winterbourne's proposal to spend the autumn among the wild solitudes of Allt-nam-ba. He, indeed, declared he had nothing to do with it. It was Yolande's doing. He had never heard of Allt-nam-ba.

"It is one of the best grouse moors in Scotland, I admit that," Colonel Graham said, with an ominous smile; "but it is a pretty stiffish place to work over."

"You talk like that, Jim," said his wife (who seemed anxious that the Winterournes should preserve their fancy for the place), "because you are getting too stout for hill work. We shall find you on a pony soon. I should like to see you shooting from the back of a pony."

"Better men than me have done that," said Inverstroy, good-humouredly.

They had a concert that night—not a ball, as was at first intended; and there was a large assemblage, even the young gentlemen of the smoking-room having forsaken their Nap when they heard that Mrs. Graham was

going to sing. And very well she sang, too, with a thoroughly trained voice of very considerable compass. She sang all the new society songs, about wild melancholies and regrets and things of that kind ; but her voice was really fine in quality ; and one almost believed for the moment that the pathos of these spasmodic things was true. And then her dress—how beautifully it fitted her neat little shoulders and waist ! Her curly short hair was surmounted by a coquettish cap ; she had a circle of diamonds set in silver round her neck ; but there were no rings to mar the symmetry of her plump and pretty white hands. And how assiduous those boy-officers were, although deprived of their cigars ! They hung round the piano ; they turned over the music for her—as well as an eyeglass permitted them to see ; nay, when she asked, one of them sent for a banjo, and performed a solo on that instrument—performing it very well too. None of the unmarried girls had the ghost of a chance. Poor Yolande, in her plain pale pink gown, was nowhere. All eyes were directed on the smart little figure at the piano ; on the stylish

costume ; the charming profile, with its outward sweep of black lashes ; on the graceful arms and white fingers. For a smile from those clear dark gray eyes, there was not one of the tall youths standing there who would not have sworn to abjure sporting newspapers for the rest of his natural life.

There was only one drawback to the concert, as a concert. To keep the saloon cool the large ports astern had been opened : and the noise of the water rushing away from the screw was apt to drown the music.

“ Miss Winterbourne,” some one said to Yolande—and she started, for she had been sitting at one of the tables, imagining herself alone, and dreaming about the music, “one can hear far better on deck. Won’t you come up and try ?”

It was the Master of Lynn.

“ Oh yes,” said she ; “ thank you.”

She went with him on deck, expecting to find her father there. But Mr. Winterbourne had gone to the smoking-room. No matter. All companions are alike on board ship. Young Leslie brought her a chair, and put it close to the skylight of the saloon ; and he

sat down there too. They could hear pretty well; and they could talk in the intervals. The night was beautifully quiet; and the moonlight whiter than ever on the decks. These southern nights were soft and fitted for music; they seemed to blend the singing below and the gentle rushing of the sea all around. And Yolande was so friendly—and frank to plain-spokenness. Once or twice she laughed; it was a low, quiet, pretty laugh.

Such were the perils of the deep that lay around them as they sailed along those southern seas. And at last they were nearing Malta. On the night before they expected to reach the island Mrs. Graham took occasion to have a quiet chat with her brother.

“Look here, Archie, we shall all be going ashore to-morrow, I suppose,” said she.

“No doubt.”

“And I daresay,” she added, fixing her clear, pretty, shrewd eyes on him, “that you will be going away to the Club with those young fellows, and we shall see nothing of you.”

“We shall be all over the place, I suppose,”

he answered. "Most likely I shall lunch at the Club. Graham can put me down; he is still a member, isn't he?"

"It would be a good deal more sensible-like," said his sister, "if you gave us lunch at a hotel."

"I?" he cried, with a laugh. "I like that! Considering my income, and Inverstroy's income, a proposal of that kind strikes one with a sort of coolness——"

"I didn't mean Jim and me only," said Mrs. Graham, sharply. "Jim can pay for his own luncheon, and mine too. Why don't you ask the Winterournes?"

This was a new notion altogether.

"They wouldn't come, would they?" he said, diffidently. "It is not a very long acquaintance. Still, they seem so friendly—and I'd like it awfully—if you think you could get Miss Winterbourne to go with you. Do you think you could, Polly? Don't you see, we ought to pay them a compliment—they've taken Allt-nam-ba."

"Miss Winterbourne," said Mrs. Graham, distantly, "is going ashore with me to-morrow. Of course we must have lunch somewhere.

If you men like to go to the Club, very well ; I suppose we shall manage."

Well, perhaps it was only a natural thing to suggest. The Winterbournes had been kind to him. Moreover, women do not like to be left to walk up and down the Strada Reale by themselves when they know that their husbands and brothers are enjoying themselves in the Union Club. But it is probable that neither Mrs. Graham nor the young Master of Lynn quite fully recollects that attentions and civilities which are simple and customary on board ship—which are a necessity of the case (people consenting to become intimate and familiar through being constantly thrown together)—may, on land, where one returns to the conventionalities of existence, suddenly assume a very different complexion, and may even appear to have a startling significance.

CHAPTER VII.

A DAY ASHORE.

Most "landward" people, to use the Scotch phrase, would imagine that on board ship ladies would be content with any rough and tumble costume that would serve all purposes from morning till night. But on a long voyage the very reverse is the case. Nowhere else do women dress with more elaborate nicety, and with such studied exhibition of variety as their tolerably capacious wardrobes permit. For one thing, they have no more engrossing occupation. They can spend hours in their cabin devising new combinations; and, as many of them are going to live abroad, they have with them all their worldly gear from which to pick and choose. It is a break in the monotony of the day to have one dress at breakfast, another for forenoon games and lunch, another for the afternoon promenade, another for the meal of state

in the evening. Then nowhere else are well-made costumes seen to such advantage ; the deck is a wide stage, and there is the best of light for colours. Moreover, in a woman's eyes it is worth while to take trouble about dressing well on board ship ; for it is no fleeting glance that rewards her pains. The mere change of a brooch at the neck is noticed.

But all the innocent little displays that had been made during the long voyage were as nothing on board this ship to the grand transformation that took place in view of the landing at Malta. The great vessel was now lying silent and still ; her screw no longer throbbing ; and instead of the wide, monotonous circle of water around her, here were blue arms of the sea running into the gray-green island ; and great yellow bastions along the shore ; and over these again a pale white and pink town straggling along the low-lying hills. After breakfast the men-folk were left in undisturbed possession of the deck. *They* were not anxious about their costume—at least, the middle-aged ones were not. They smoked their cigars, and leaned over the rail,

and watched the swarm of gaily-painted boats that were waiting to take them ashore. And perhaps some of them were beginning to wish that the women would look alive ; for already the huge barges filled with coal were drawing near, and soon the vessel would be enveloped in clouds of dust.

Then the women began to come up, one by one ; but all transformed ! They were scarcely recognisable by mere acquaintances. There was about them the look of a Sunday afternoon in Kensington Gardens ; and it was strange enough on the deck of a ship. People who had been on sufficiently friendly terms now grew a little more reserved ; these land costumes reminded them that on shore they might have less claim to a free-and-easy companionship. And Mr. Winterbourne grew anxious. Did Yolande know ? The maid she had brought with her, and whose services she had agreed to share with Mrs. Graham, had been useless enough, from the moment she put foot on board the ship ; but surely she must have learned what was going forward ? Perhaps Yolande would appear in her ordinary pale pink morning dress ? She

was far too content with simplicity in costume. Again and again he had had to rebuke her.

"Why don't you have more dresses?" he had said to her on board this very ship. "Look at Mrs. Graham. Why don't you have as many dresses as Mrs. Graham? A married lady? What difference does that make? I like to see you prettily dressed. When I want you to save money, I will tell you. You can't get them at sea? Well, of course not; but you might have got them on shore. And if it meant more trunks, what is the use of Jane?"

He was a nervous and fidgety man, and he was beginning to be really concerned about Yolande's appearance, when he caught a glimpse of Yolande herself, coming out on to the deck from the companion-way. He was instantly satisfied. There was nothing striking about her dress, it is true—the skirt and sleeves were of dark blue velvet, the rest of dark blue linen, and she wore her white silver belt—but at all events it was different; and then the flat, dark blue Scotch cap looked pretty enough on her ruddy-golden hair. Indeed,

he need not have been afraid that Yolande would have appeared insignificant anyhow or anywhere. Her tall stature ; her slender and graceful figure ; her air and carriage—all these rendered her quite sufficiently distinguished-looking ; even when one was not near enough to know anything of the fascination of her eyes and the pretty, pathetic mouth.

And yet he was so anxious that she should acquit herself well—he was so proud of her—that he went to her quickly and said—

“ That is one of the prettiest of your dresses, Yolande—very pretty—and it suits your silver girdle very well—but the Scotch cap—well, that suits you too, you know——”

“ It is Mrs. Graham’s, papa. She asked me to wear it—in honour of Allt-nam-ba.”

“ Yes, yes,” he said. “ That is all very well—at Allt-nam-ba. It is very pretty—and Jane has done your hair very nicely this morning——”

“ I have not had a glimpse of Jane this morning !” Yolande said with a laugh. “ Could I be so cruel ? No. Mrs. Graham going ashore—and I to take Jane away ?—how could I ?”

"I don't like the arrangement," her father said, with a frown. "Why should you not have the help of your own maid? But about the cap, Yolande—look, these other ladies are dressed as if they were going to church. The cap would be very pretty at a garden-party—at lawn-tennis—but I think——"

"Oh yes, I will put on a bonnet," said Yolande, instantly. "It is not to please Mrs. Graham—it is to please you—that I care for. One minute——"

But who was this who intercepted her? Not the lazy young fellow who used to lounge about the decks in a shooting-coat, with a cigarette scarcely ever absent from his fingers or lips; but a most elegant young gentleman in tall hat and frock-coat, who was dressed with the most remarkable precision, from his collar and stiff neck-tie to his snow-white gaiters and patent-leather boots.

"Are you ready to go ashore, Miss Winterbourne?" said he, smoothing his gloves the while. "My sister is just coming up."

"In one minute," she said; "I am going for a bonnet, instead of my Scotch cap——"

"Oh no," he said, quickly; "please don't.

Please, wear the cap. You have no idea how well it becomes you. And it would be so kind of you to pay a compliment to the Highlands—I think half the officers on board belong to the Seaforth Highlanders—and if we go to look at the Club——”

“ No, thank you,” she said, passing him with a friendly smile. “ I am not going *en vivandière*. Perhaps I will borrow the cap some other time—at Allt-nam-ba.”

Mr. Winterbourne overheard this little conversation—in fact, the three of them were almost standing together; and whether it was that the general excitement throughout the vessel had also affected him, or whether it was that the mere sight of all these people in different costumes had made him suddenly conscious of what were their real relations—not their ship relations—it certainly startled him to hear the young Master of Lynn, apparently on the same familiar footing as himself, advise Yolande as to what became her. The next step was inevitable. He was easily alarmed. He recalled his friend Shortlands’ remark—which he had rather resented at the time—that a P. and O. voyage

would marry off anybody who wanted to get married. He thought of Yolande; and he was stricken dumb with a nameless fear. Was she going away from him? Was some one else about to supplant him in her affections? These two had been in a very literal sense all the world to each other. They had been constant companions. They knew few people; for he lived in a lonely, nomadic kind of way; and Yolande never seemed to care for any society but his own. And now was she going away from him?

Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had just arranged to take her away into those wild solitudes in the Highlands, where the Leslies would be their only neighbours. It seemed more and more inevitable. But why not? Why should not this happen? He nerved himself to face the worst. Yolande must marry some day. He had declared to John Shortlands that he almost wished she would marry now. And how could she marry better? This young fellow was of good birth and education; well-mannered and modest; altogether unexceptionable, as far as one could judge. And Mr. Winter-

bourne had been judging, unconsciously to himself. He had observed in the smoking-room and elsewhere that young Leslie was inclined to be cautious about the expenditure of money—at cards or otherwise; but was not that rather a good trait? The family were not wealthy; the present Lord Lynn had been engaged all his life in slowly paying off the mortgages on the family estates; and no doubt this young fellow had been economically brought up. And then again—if Yolande were to marry at all—would it not be better that she should be transferred to that distant and safe solitude? Yolande as the mistress of Lynn Towers—far away there in the seclusion of the hills—living a happy and peaceful life, free from scathe and terror; that was a fancy that pleased him. It seemed not so terrible now that Yolande should marry—at least—at least he would face the worst, and strive to look at the pleasanter aspects of it. She would be far away—and safe.

These anxious, rapid, struggling thoughts had not occupied a couple of minutes. Yolande appeared, and he was almost afraid

to regard her. Might there not be something of the future written in her face? Indeed, there was nothing there but a pleasant interest about the going on shore; and when she accepted a little nosegay that the Master of Lynn brought her, and pinned it on her dress, it was with a smile of thanks, but with—to any unconcerned eyes—the very frankest indifference.

The Grahams now announced themselves as ready; and the party descended the gangway into the boat—young Leslie preceding them, so as to hand Yolande into her place.

"Mr. Winterbourne," said he, when they were all seated under the awning, and sailing away through the lapping green water, "I hope you and your daughter will come and lunch with us——"

"Oh yes, of course," said he: did they not make one party?

"But what I mean is this," said the Master of Lynn, "I am giving those Graham people their lunch—the cormorants!—and Lynn Towers is a long way off; and I haven't often the chance of playing host; and so I

want you and Miss Winterbourne also to be my guests at the —— Hotel."

"Oh, thanks; very well," said Yolande's father, who had begun now to study this young man with the most observant but cautious scrutiny, and was in a strange kind of way anxious to be pleased with him.

"Why, I thought you were going to the Club they were all speaking of," said Yolande, staring at him. "Captain Douglas told me so."

"Captain Douglas thinks he knows everything," said young Leslie, good-naturedly; "whereas he knows nothing, except how to play sixpenny loo."

"But we will all go to the Club, Miss Yolande," said Colonel Graham, "and you shall see the ball-room. Very fine. I don't know what the high-art fellows nowadays would think of it. I used to think it uncommonly fine in bygone times. Gad, I'm not so fond of dancing now."

"You can dance as well as ever you did, Jim, only you're so lazy," his wife said, sharply.

"You'll have to give them a torchlight

dance, Archie," the Colonel continued, "the first stag Mr. Winterbourne kills. Miss Yolande would like to look at that. And you're pretty good yourself at the sword-dance. I once could do it in a way——"

"Jim, I won't have you talk as if you were an old man," his wife said, angrily. "I don't care about you; I care about myself. I won't have you talk like that. Everybody on board thinks I'm forty."

"You are not so young as you once were, you know, Polly."

But Mrs. Graham was much too radiant a coquette to be put out by any impertinent speech like that. She was too sure of herself. She knew what her glass told her—and the half-concealed admiration of a whole shipful of people. She could afford to treat such speeches with contempt. And so they reached the shore.

They refused to have a carriage; preferring rather to climb away up the steep steps, and away up the steep little streets, until they reached those high and narrow thoroughfares (with their pink and yellow houses, and pretty balconies, and green case-

ments) that were so cool and pleasant to wander through. Sometimes the sun, though shut out, sent a reflected light down into these streets in so peculiar a fashion that the pink fronts of the houses looked quite transparent ; and not unfrequently, at the far end of the thoroughfare, the vista was closed in by a narrow band of the deepest and intensest blue—the high horizon-line of the distant sea. They went up to St. John's bastion, to look at the wilderness of geraniums and lotus-trees. They went to St. John's Church. They went to the telegraph office, where the Master of Lynn sent off this message :—

*Archibald Leslie,
— Hotel, Malta.*

*Ronald MacPherson,
High Street,
Inverness.*

*Consider Allt-nam-ba, if unlet, taken by Winterbourne, M.P.
Slagpool, Seven hundred fifty. Reply.*

They went to see the Governor's garden, and, in short, all the sights of the place ; but what charmed the women-folk most of all was, naturally, the great ball-room at the Union Club. As they stood in the big, empty, hollow-resounding place, Yolande said—

"Oh yes, it is beautiful. It must be cool, with such a high roof. Papa, have they as fine a ball-room at the Reform Club?"

"The Reform Club?" her father repeated—rather vexed that she should make such a blunder. "Of course not! Who ever heard of such a thing!"

"Why not?" she said. "Every one says this is a good club—and very English. Why not at the Reform Club? Is that why you have never taken me there?"

"Well, it is; it is devilish English-looking," said Colonel Graham to his wife, as they turned into the long and cool coffee-room, where there were rows of small tables all nicely furnished out. "I like it. It reminds me of old times. I like to see the fellows in the old uniforms; it makes one's heart warm. Hanged if I don't have a glass of sherry and bitters just to see if it tastes like the real thing—or a brandy and soda. It's devilish like home. I don't like being waited on by these Lascar-Portuguese-half-nigger fellows. My chap said to me yesterday at breakfast when I asked for poached eggs—'No go yet—when go bell me bring.' And another

fellow, when I asked for my bath, said, ‘ Hot water no go—when go hot water, me tell.’ By Gad, there’s old Munro—the fellow that nailed the Sepoys at Azimghur—he’s got as fat as a turkey-cock——”

Indeed the members of the Club—mostly officers, apparently—were now coming in to lunch ; and soon Colonel Graham was fairly mobbed by old friends and acquaintances, insomuch that it was with difficulty he was drawn away to the banquet that young Leslie—taking advantage of the stay of the party in St. John’s Church—had had prepared for them at the hotel. It was a modest feast, but merry enough ; and the table was liberally adorned with flowers, of which there is no lack in Malta. Colonel Graham was much excited with meeting those old friends, and had a great deal to say about them ; his wife was glad to have a rest after so much walking ; Yolande was naturally interested in the foreign look of the place and the people ; and young Leslie, delighted to have the honour of being host, played that part with much tact and modesty and skill.

To Mr. Winterbourne it was strange.

Yolande seemed to half belong to those people already. Mrs. Graham appeared to claim her as a sister. On board ship these things were not so noticeable ; for of course they met at meals ; and the same groups that were formed at table had a tendency to draw together again on deck or in the saloon. But here was this small party cut off from all the rest of the passengers ; and they were entirely on the footing of old friends ; and the Master of Lynn's anxiety to please Yolande was most marked and distinct. On board ship it would scarcely have been noticed ; here it was obvious to the most careless eye. And yet, when he turned to Yolande herself, who, as might have been imagined, ought to have been conscious that she was being singled out for a very special attention and courtesy, he could read no such consciousness in her face—nothing but a certain pleasant friendliness, and indifference.

After luncheon they went away for a long drive to see more sights ; and in the afternoon returned to the hotel, before going on board. Young Leslie was thinking of

leaving instructions that the telegram from Inverness should be forwarded on to Cairo when, fortunately, it arrived. It read curiously—

Ronald MacPherson, *The Honourable the Master of Lynn,*
Estate and Colliery Agent, *Of the P. and O. Company's*
High Street, *Steam-ship ——,*
Inverness. *The —— Hotel, Malta.*

Right.

“Now, what on earth—oh, I see!” exclaimed the recipient of this telegram, after staring at it in a bewildered fashion for a moment. “I see. Here is a most beautiful joke. MacPherson has wanted to be clever. Has found out that telegraphing to Malta is pretty dear; thinks he will make the message as short as possible—but will take it out in the address. I am certain that is it. He has fancied the address was free, as in England; and he has sent his clerk to the office. Won’t the clerk catch it when he goes back and says what he has paid! That is real Highland shrewdness. Never mind; you have got the shooting, Mr. Winterbourne.”

“I am glad of that,” said Yolande’s father,

rather absently ; for now, when he thought of the solitudes of Allt-nam-ba, it was not of stags or grouse or mountain hares that he was thinking.

They got on board again, and almost immediately went below to prepare for dinner, for the decks were still dirty with the coal-dust. And that night they were again at sea—far away in the silences ; and a small group of them were up at the end of the saloon, practising glees for the next grand concert. Mr. Winterbourne was on deck, walking up and down, alone ; and perhaps trying to fancy how it would be with him when he was really left alone, and Yolande entirely away from him, with other cares and occupations. And he was striving to convince himself that that would be best ; that he would himself feel happier if Yolande's future in life were secured,—if he could see her the contented and proud mistress of Lynn Towers. Here, on board this ship, it might seem a hard thing that they should separate, even though the separation were only a mitigated one ; but if they were back in England again, he knew those terrible

fears would again beset him, and that it would be the first wish of his heart that Yolande should get married. At Lynn Towers he might see her sometimes. It was remote, and quiet, and safe; sometimes Yolande and he would walk together there.

Meanwhile, down below they had finished their practising; and the Master of Lynn was idly turning over a book of glees.

"Polly," said he to his sister, "I like that one as well as any—I mean the words. Don't you think they apply very well to Miss Winterbourne?"

His sister took the book, and read Sheridan's lines—

"Marked you her eye of heavenly blue?
Marked you her cheek of roseate hue?
That eye in liquid circles moving;
That cheek abashed at man's approving;
The one love's arrows darting round,
The other blushing at the wound."

Well, the music of this glee is charming; and the words are well enough; but when the Master of Lynn ventured the opinion that these were a good description of Yolande, he never made a worse shot in his life. Yolande

“abashed at man’s approving?” She let no such nonsense get into her head. She was a little too proud for that—or perhaps only careless and indifferent.

CHAPTER VIII.

RECONNAISSANCES.

"I DON'T believe in any such simplicity. Men may ; women don't. It seems to me more the simplicity of an accomplished flirt."

The speaker was Mrs. Graham ; and she spoke with an air of resentment.

"You don't know her !" said the Master of Lynn, with involuntary admiration.

"I suppose you think you do," his sister said, with a 'superior' smile. And then—perhaps she was tired of hearing so much in praise of Yolande ; or perhaps she wished her brother to be cautious ; or perhaps she was merely gratuitously malicious—she said : "I'll tell you what it is—I should not be at all surprised to hear that she was engaged, and has been engaged for any length of time."

He was struck silent by this fierce sugges-

tion ; it bewildered him for a second or two. Then he exclaimed—

“ Oh, that is absurd—perfectly absurd ! I know she is not !”

“ It would be a joke,” continued his sister, with a sardonic smile, “ if that were the explanation of the wonderful friendliness that puzzles you so much. If she is engaged, of course she has no further care or embarrassment. Everything is settled. She is as frank with Dick as with Tom and Harry. Oh, Archie, that would be a joke—how Jim would laugh at you !”

“ But it isn’t true,” he said, angrily, “ and you know it isn’t. It is quite absurd.”

“ I will find out for you, if you like,” his sister said, calmly ; and here the conversation ceased, for Colonel Graham at this moment came along to ask his brother-in-law for a light.

They were again away from the land—perhaps even forgetful that such a thing existed. It seemed quite natural to get up morning after morning to find around them the same bright, brilliant monotony of white-crested blue seas and sunlit decks and fair

skies ; and each day passed with the usual amusements ; and then came the still moonlight night, with all its mysterious charm and loneliness. It was a delightful life—especially for the Grahams and Winterbournes, who were going nowhere in particular, but had come chiefly for the voyage itself. And it was a life the very small incidents of which excited interest, simply because people had plenty of time to consider them—and each other.

There was no doubt that Yolande had become a pretty general favourite ; for she found herself very much at home ; and she put aside a good deal of that reserve which she assumed in travelling on land. These people could in no sense be considered strangers ; they were all too kind to her. The ship's officers brought her the charts out of the chart-room, to show her how far the vessel had got on her course. The captain allowed her to go on the bridge, and gave her his own glass when a distant sail was to be seen. And the young soldiers, when they were not in the smoking-room, and when they were not picking up rope quoits for Mrs.

Graham, had an eye on the many strayed birds fluttering about, and when they could they caught one and brought it to Miss Winterbourne, who was glad to take the wild-eyed fluttering wanderer down into the saloon and put its beak for a second or two into a glass of fresh water. The swallows were the most easily caught; they were either more exhausted or more tame than the quails and thrushes and ringdoves. Once or twice Yolande herself caught one of these swallows; and the beautiful bronze-blue creature seemed not anxious to get away from her hand. Mrs. Graham said it was too ludicrous to see the Major of a Highland regiment—a man six feet two in height, with a portentously grave face—screw his eye-glass into its place and set off to stalk a dead-tired thrush, pursuing it along the awning and from boat to boat. But all the same, these warriors seemed pleased enough when they could bring to Yolande one of these trembling captives, and when she took the poor thing carefully into her hands, and looked up, and said “Oh, thank you!” It ought to be mentioned that the short upper

lip of the girl, though it had the pathetic droop at the corners which has been mentioned—and which an artist friend of the writer says ought to have been described as Cupid's bow being drawn slightly—lent itself very readily to a smile.

Mrs. Graham watched for a chance of speaking to Yolande, and soon found it. She went to the girl, who was standing by the rail of the hurricane-deck, and put her arm most affectionately round her, and said—

“ My dear child, what are you staring into the sea for? Do you expect to see dolphins?”

“ I was wondering what made the water so blue,” said she, raising herself somewhat. “ It is not the sky. If you look at the water for a while, and turn to the sky, the sky is a pale washed-out purple. What a wonderful blue it is, too; it seems to me twenty times more intense than the blue of the water along the Riviera.”

“ You have been along the Riviera?”

“ Oh, two or three times,” said Yolande. “ We always go that way into Italy.”

“ You must have travelled a great deal, from what I hear.”

"Yes," said Yolande, with a slight sigh, "I am afraid it is a great misfortune. It is papa's kindness to me; but I am sorry. It takes him away. At one time he said it was my education; but now we both laugh at that—for a pretence. Oh I assure you we are such bad travellers—we never go to see anything that we ought to see. When we go to Venice, we go to the Lido, and the sands—but to the churches?—no. In Egypt you will have to do all the sight-seeing: you will find us—oh, so very lazy that you cannot imagine it; you will go and see the tombs and the inscriptions, and papa and I, we will take a walk and look at the river until you come back."

"What a strange life to have led," said her friend, who had her own point in view. "And among all your wanderings, did you never meet the one who is to be nearer and dearer——?"

"Nearer and dearer?" said Yolande, looking puzzled. "Papa is nearer and dearer to me than any one or anything—naturally. That is why we are always satisfied to be together; that is what makes our travelling so consoling—no—so—so contented."

"But what I mean is—now forgive me, dear Yolande—you know I'm a very impudent woman—I mean, in all your travels have you never come across some one whom you would care to marry? Indeed, indeed, you must have met many a one who would have been glad to carry you off—that I can tell you without flattery."

"Indeed, not any one!" said Yolande, with a perfectly frank laugh. "That is not what I would ever think of. That is not what I wish." And then she added, with an air of sadness: "Perhaps I am never to have what I wish—it is a pity—a misfortune."

"What is it, then, dear Yolande? In your father's position I don't see what there is in the world that he could not get for you. You see I am curious—I am very impudent—but I should like to treat you like my own sister—I am not quite old enough to act as a mother to you, for all that Jim says."

"Oh, it is simple enough—it does not sound difficult," Yolande said. "Come, we will sit down and I will tell you."

They sat down in two deck-chairs that

happened to be handy, and Mrs. Graham took the girl's hand in hers; because she really liked her, although at times human nature broke down, and she thought her husband was carrying his praises of Yolande just a trifle too far.

"When I have met English ladies abroad," said Yolande, "and the one or two families I know in London, it was so nice to hear them talk of their home—perhaps in the country, where every one seemed to know them, and they had so many interests, so many affections. They were proud of that. It was a tie. They were not merely wanderers. Even your brother, dear Mrs. Graham, he has filled me with envy of him, when he has told me of the district around Lynn Towers, and seeming to know every one, and always settled there, and capable to make friends for a lifetime, not for a few hours in a hotel. What place do I really know in the world—what place do they really know me?—a little village in France that you never heard of! And I am English! I am not French. Ah yes, that is what I have many a time wished—that my papa would have a house like

others—in the country?—yes—or in the town?—yes—what does that matter to me? And I should make it pretty for him; and he would have a home—not a hotel; also I have thought of being a secretary to him, but perhaps that is too much beyond what is possible. Do you think I can imagine anything about marrying when this far more serious thing is what I wish? Do you think that any one can be nearer and dearer to me than the one who has given me all his affection, all his life, who thinks only of me, who has sacrificed already far too much for me? Who else has done that for me? And you would not have me ungrateful? Besides, also, it is selfish. I do not like the society of any one nearly so much; why should I change for a stranger? But it is not necessary to speak of that—it is a stupidity—but now I have told you what I wish for, if it were possible."

Mrs. Graham was convinced. There was no affectation here. The Master of Lynn had no rival, at all events.

"Do you know, my dear child, you talk very sensibly," said she, patting her hand.

"And I don't see why your papa should not give you two homes—one in the country and one in town,—for I am sure every one says he is wealthy enough. But perhaps this is the reason. Of course you will marry—no, stay a minute—I tell you you are sure to marry. Why, the idea! Well, then, in that case, it might be better for your papa not to have a household to break up; he could attend to his Parliamentary duties very well if he lived in the Westminster Palace Hotel, for example, and be free from care——"

Yolande's mouth went very far down this time.

"Yes, that may be it," she said. "Perhaps that will happen. I know I have taken away too much of his time; and once, twice perhaps, we have had jokes about my being married; but this was the end, that when my papa tells me to marry, then I will marry. I must go somewhere. If I am too much of a burden—and sometimes I am very sad and think that I am—then he must go and bring some one to me, and say 'Marry him.' And I will marry him—and hate him."

"Gracious Heavens, child, what are you

saying ? Of course if ever you should marry, you will choose for yourself."

"It is not my affair," said Yolande, coldly. "If I am to go away, I will go away, but I shall hate the one that takes me away."

"Yolande," said her friend, seriously, "you are making it rather hard for your father. Perhaps I have no right to interfere ; but you have no mother to guide you, and really you talk such—such absurdity——"

"But how do I make it hard for my papa ?" said Yolande, quickly looking up with an anxious glance. "Am I a constraint? Do you think there is something he would do? Am I in his way—a burden to him ?"

"No, no, no," said the other, good-humouredly. "Why should you think any such thing ? I was only referring to the madness of your own fancy. The idea that your father is to choose a husband for you—whom you will hate ! Now suppose that you are a burden—I believe I informed you that I was a very impertinent woman, and now I am an intermeddler as well—suppose that your father would like to take a more active part in public affairs, and that he knows you

are opposed to the very notion of getting married. He is in a very painful dilemma. He won't tell you that you are rather interfering with his Parliamentary work. And most assuredly he won't recommend you to marry any one, if you are going to marry with a deadly grudge against your husband."

Yolande thought over this for some minutes.

"I suppose it is true," she said, rather sadly. "He would not tell me. He has said I kept him away from the House of Commons; but then it was only amusement and joking. And I—I also—have many a time been fearing it was not right he should waste so much care on me, when no one else does that with their daughters. Why does he go to the House? Partly because it is his duty to work for the country—to see that it is well-governed; partly to make fame, which is a noble ambition. And then I interfere. He thinks I am not quite well when I am quite well. He thinks I am dull when I am not dull—when I would rather read his speech in the newspapers than go anywhere. But always the same—I must go and be amused,

and Parliament and everything is left behind. It was not so bad when I was at the Château ; then I was learning ; but even then he was always coming to see me and to take me away. And when I used to say, ‘Papa, why don’t you take me to England ? I am English ; I want to see my own country, not other countries ;’—it was always : ‘You will see enough of England by and by.’ But when I go to England, look ! it is the same—always away again, except a week or two, perhaps, at Oatlands Park, or a day or two in London ; and I have not once been to the House of Commons, where every one goes, and even my papa is vexed that I do not know they have not a ball-room at the Reform Club !’

“Well, dear Yolande, you have led a queer sort of life ; but, after all, was not your father wise ? He could not have a household with a schoolgirl to look after it. But now I can see that all this will be changed ; and you will have no more fears that you are a restraint. Of course you will marry, and you will be very happy ; and your papa will have your home to go to at the Easter holidays ;

and you will go up to town to hear him speak in the House ; and he will have a fair chance in politics. So that is all arranged, and you are not to have any wild or fierce theories. There goes dressing-bell ; come along !”

Day after day passed without change. The young Master of Lynn had been reassured by his sister ; and very diligently, and with a Jacob-like modesty and patience, he strove to win Yolande’s regard ; but although she was always most friendly towards him and pleased to chat with him, or walk the hurricane-deck with him, she seemed to treat him precisely as she treated any of the others. If there was one whom she especially favoured, it was Colonel Graham, whose curt, sardonic speeches amused her.

At last they arrived at Port Said, that curious, rectangular-streeted, shanty-built place, that looks like Cheyenne painted pink and white ; and of course there was much wonder and interest in beholding land again, and green water, and the swarming boats with their Greeks and Maltese and Negroes and Arabs, all in their various costumes.

But it was with a far greater interest that they regarded the picture around them when the vessel had started again, and was slowly and silently stealing away into the wide and lonely desert land, by means of this water highway. The Suez Canal had been rather a commonplace phrase to Yolande—mixed up with monetary affairs mostly, and suggestive of machinery. But all this was strange and new ; and the vessel was going so slowly that the engines were scarcely heard ; she seemed to glide into this dream-world of silver sky and far-reaching wastes of yellow sand. It was so silent, and so wide, and so lonely. For the most part the horizon-line was a mirage ; and they watched the continual undulation of the silver-white waves, and even the strange reflections of what appeared to be islands ; but here there was not even a palm to break the monotony of the desert—only the little tamarisk bushes dotting the sand. From a marsh a red-legged flamingo rose, slowly winging its way to the south. Then a string of camels came along with forward-stretching heads, and broad, slow-pacing feet ; the Bedouins either

perched on the backs of the animals or striding through the sand by their side, their faces looking black in contrast to their white wide-flowing garments. And so they glided through the silent, gray, silver world.

The night saw another scene. They were anchored in a narrow part of the canal where the banks were high and steep; and the moonlight was surpassingly vivid. On one of these banks—it seemed a great mountain as it rose to the dark blue vault where the stars were—the moonlight threw the shadow of the rigging of the ship so sharply that every spar and rope was traced on the silver-clear sand. There was an almost oppressive silence in this desert solitude; a dark animal that came along through the tamarisk bushes—some said it was a jackal—disappeared up and over the sand-mountain like a ghost. And in the midst of this weird, cold moonlight and silence these people began to get up a dance after dinner. The piano was brought on deck from the saloon. The women-folk had put on their prettiest costumes. There had been, perhaps (so it was said), a little begging and half-promising

going on beforehand. The smoking-room was deserted. From the supports of the awnings a number of large lanterns had been slung; so that when the ladies began to appear, and when the first notes of the music were heard, the scene was a very animated and pretty one, but so strange with the moonlit desert around.

The Master of Lynn had got hold of Yolande—he had been watching for her appearance.

“I hope you will give me a dance, Miss Winterbourne,” said he.

“Oh yes, with pleasure,” said she, in the most friendly way.

“There are no programmes, of course,” said he, “and one can’t make engagements; but I think a very good rule in a thing like this is that one should dance with one’s friends. For myself, I don’t care to dance with strangers. It doesn’t interest me. I think when people form a party among themselves on board ship—well, I think they should keep to themselves——”

“Oh, but that is very selfish, is it not?” Yolande said. “We are not supposed to be

strangers with any one after being on board ship so long together——”

“ Miss Winterbourne, may I have the pleasure of dancing this waltz with you ? ” said a tall solemn man with an eye-glass ; and the next minute the Master of Lynn beheld Yolande walking towards that cleared space with Major Mackinnon, of the Seaforth Highlanders ; and as to what he thought of the Seaforth Highlanders, and what he hoped would happen to them, from their colonel down to their pipe-major, it is unnecessary to say anything here.

But Yolande did give him the next dance, which mollified him a little—not altogether, however, for it was only a square. The next was a Highland Schottische ; and by ill-luck he took it for granted that Yolande, having been brought up in France, would know nothing about it, so he went away and sought out his sister. Their performance was the feature of the evening. No one else thought of interfering. And it was very cleverly, and prettily, and artistically done ; insomuch that a round of applause greeted them at the end—even from the young High-

land officers, who considered that young Leslie might just as well have sought a partner elsewhere, instead of claiming his own sister. Immediately after the Master of Lynn returned to Yolande.

"Ah, that is very pretty," she said. "No wonder they approved you and clapped their hands. It is the most picturesque of all the dances—especially when there are only two, and you have the whole deck for display. In a ball-room, perhaps no."

"You must learn it, Miss Winterbourne, before you come north," said he. "We always dance it in the north."

"Oh, but I know it very well," said Yolande, quietly.

"You?" said he, in an injured way. "Why didn't you tell me? Do you think I wanted to dance with my sister and leave you here?"

"But Mrs. Graham and you danced it so prettily—oh, very well, indeed——"

There was somebody else approaching them now—for the lady at the piano had that instant begun another waltz. This was Captain Douglas, also of the Seaforth Highlanders.

"Miss Winterbourne, if you are not engaged, will you give me this waltz?"

Yolande did not hesitate. Why should she? She was not engaged.

"Oh yes, thanks," said she, with much friendliness, and she rose and took Captain Douglas's arm.

But young Leslie could not bear this perfidy, as he judged it. He would have no more to do with the dance or with her. Without a word to any one he went away to the smoking-room and sat down there, savage and alone. He lit a cigar and smoked vehemently.

"Polly talks about men being bamboozled by women," he was thinking bitterly. "She knows nothing about it. It is women who know nothing about women; they hide themselves from each other. But she was right on one point. That girl is the most infernal flirt that ever stepped the earth."

And still, far away, he could hear the sound of the music, and also the stranger sound—like a whispering of silken wings—of feet on the deck. He was angry and indignant. Yolande could not be blind to

his constant devotion to her; and yet she treated him exactly as if he were a stranger—going off with the first-comer! Simplicity! His sister was right—it was the simplicity of a first-class flirt.

And still the waltz went on, and he heard the winnowing sound of the dancers' feet; and his thoughts were bitter enough. He was only five-and-twenty; at that age hopes and fears and disappointments are emphatic and near; probably it never occurred to him to turn from the vanities of the hour, and from the petty throbbing anxieties and commonplaces of everyday life, to think of the awful solitudes all around him there—the voiceless, world-old desert lying so dim and strange under the moonlight and the stars, its vast and mysterious heart quite pulseless and calm.

CHAPTER IX.

CLOUDS.

NEXT morning, quite unconscious that she had dealt any deadly injury to any one, Yolande was seated all by herself on the hurricane-deck, idly and carelessly and happily drinking in fresh clear air and looking away over the wastes of golden sand to a strip of intense dark blue that was soon to reveal itself as the waters of a lake. She was quite alone. The second officer had brought her one of the ship's glasses, and had then (greatly against his will) gone on the bridge again. The morning was fair and shining; the huge steamer was going placidly and noiselessly through the still water; if Yolande was thinking of anything it was probably that she had never seen her father so pleased and contented as on this long voyage: and perhaps she was wondering whether, after all, it might not be quite

as well that he should give up Parliament altogether, so that they two might wander away through the world, secure in each other's company.

Nor was she aware that, at this precise moment, her future was being accurately arranged for her in one of the cabins below.

"I confess I don't see where there can be the least objection," Mrs. Graham was saying to her husband (who was still lying in his berth, turning over the pages of a novel), as she fixed a smart mob-cap on her short and pretty curls. "I have looked at it every way. Papa may make a fuss about Mr. Winterbourne's politics; but there are substantial reasons why he should say as little as possible. Just think how he has worked at the improving of the estate all his life, and with scarcely any money; and just fancy Archie coming in to complete the thing. I know what I would do. I would drain and plant the Rushen slopes, and build a nice lodge there; and then I would take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba and make it a small forest; and it would let for twice as much

again. Oh, Jim, just fancy if Archie were to be able to buy back Corrievbreak!"

Her husband flung the book aside, and put his hands under his head. His imagination was at work.

"If I were Archie," he said, with his eyes fixed on vacancy, "I would make Corrievbreak the sanctuary; that's what I would do. Then I would put a strip of sheep up the Glenbuie side to fence off Sir John—do you see that, Polly? And then I would take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba, as you say, only I would add on Allt-nam-ba to Lynn. Do you see that? What made your grandfather part with Corrievbreak I don't know. Fancy having the sanctuary within two miles of a steam-boat pier; it's a standing temptation to all the poachers in the country! Now, if you take in Allt-nam-ba and make Corrievbreak the sanctuary, and if you'd hold your hand for a year or two in the letting, you'd soon have one of the best forests in Scotland. But letting is the mischief. Those fellows from the south shoot anything on four legs they can get at. Forty years ago the finest stags in Inverness-shire were found round

and about Corrievreak—the Fort Augustus lads knew that—they used to say. Oh, I quite agree with you. I think it would be an uncommon good match. And then Archie would have a house in town, I suppose; and they might put us up for a week or two in the season. Tit for tat's fair play. He has the run of Inverstroy when there isn't a bit of rabbit-shooting left to him at Lynn."

"Well, but there's just this, you know, Jim," his wife said, with an odd kind of smile: "We know very little about what kind of girl she is, and Archie knows less than we do."

"Oh, she's well enough," said the stout soldier, carelessly. That was a subsidiary point. What his mind clearly grasped was the importance of having Corrievreak made the sanctuary of the deer forest.

"She is well enough, no doubt," his wife said; and as she had finished her toilet she now stood and regarded him with a demure kind of hesitation in her face, as if she were afraid to confess her thoughts. "She is well enough. She has good manners. She is

distinguished-looking for a girl of her age ; and you know all the money in Slagpool wouldn't induce papa to receive a dowdy daughter-in-law. And she doesn't flirt, unless —well, it's just possible she knows that that indifference of hers is attractive to young men ; it puts them on their mettle and touches their vanity. But after all, Jim, we know very little about the girl. We don't know what sort of a wife she would make. She has come through nothing, less than most girls ; for she might as well have been in a convent as in that Château. And of course she can't expect life always to be as pleasant for her ; and—and—she has come through no crisis to show what kind of stuff she is made of, and we might all be mistaken——”

“ Oh, I see what you're driving at,” her husband said, with just a touch of contempt. “ Don't be alarmed : I daresay Archie isn't anxious to marry a tragedy queen. I don't see why Miss Winterbourne should be put to any fiery trial, or should have to go through mortal agonies, any more than the majority of young women in exceptionally

easy circumstances. And if she should, I have no doubt she will show common sense ; and men prefer common sense to hysterics—a long way. I think she has common sense ; and I don't see why she and Archie shouldn't marry, and have a pleasant enough time of it ; and I suppose they will quarrel until one or other gets tired of quarrelling, and refuses ; and if they only have a tidy little house about Bruton Street or Conduit Street, and a good cook, it will be very convenient for us. Now I wish to goodness you'd clear out, and let me get dressed."

The dismissal was summary ; but pretty Mrs. Graham was a good-natured woman ; and with much equanimity she left the cabin, made her way along the saloon, and up the companion-way to the outer air. About the first person she ran against was her brother ; and black thunder was on his face.

"Where is Miss Winterbourne ?" she said, inadvertently, and without reflecting that the question was odd.

"On the hurricane-deck," said he. "I daresay you will find half the officers of the ship round her."

There was something in his tone which caused his sister, with considerable sharpness, to ask him what he meant; and then out came the story of his wrongs. Now Mrs. Graham had not been too well pleased when her husband and everybody else sang the praises of Yolande to her; but no sooner was the girl attacked in this way than she instantly—and with a good deal of warmth—flew to her defence. What right had he to suppose that Miss Winterbourne ought to have singled him out as different from the others? Why should she not dance with whomsoever she pleased? If the ship's officers showed her some little ordinary courtesies, why should she not be civil in return? What right of possession had he in her? What was he to her in any way whatever?

"You said yourself she was a flirt," her brother retorted.

"I?" she said. "I? I said nothing of the kind! I said that the preposterous innocence that you discovered in her was more like the innocence of a confirmed flirt. But that only shows me that you know nothing

at all about her. To imagine that she should have kept all her dances for you——”

“I imagine nothing of the sort,” he answered, with equal vehemence. “But I imagined that as we were travelling together as friends, even a small amount of friendliness might have been shown. But it is no matter——”

“You are quite right, it is no matter,” she interrupted. “I have no doubt Miss Winterbourne will find plenty to understand her character a little better than you seem to do. You seem to think that you should have everything—that everything should be made smooth and pleasant for you. I suppose, when you marry, you will expect your wife to go through life with her ball-room dress on. It isn’t her womanly nature that you will be thinking of; but whether she dresses well enough to make other women envious!”

All this was somewhat incoherent; but there was a confused recollection in her brain of what she had been saying to her husband, and also, perhaps, a vague impression that these words were exculpating herself from certain possible charges.

" You don't consider whether a woman is fit to stand the test of suffering and trouble : do you think she is always going to be a pretty doll to sit at the head of your dinner-table ? You think you know what Yolande's nature is ; but you know nothing about it. You know that she has pretty eyes, perhaps ; and you get savage when she looks at any one else——"

She turned quickly away : Yolande had at that moment appeared at the top of the steps. And when she came down to the deck, Mrs. Graham caught her with both hands, and kissed her, and still held her hands and regarded her most affectionately.

" Dear Yolande, how well you are looking !" she exclaimed (meaning that her brother should hear ; but he had walked away). " Dissipation does not harm you a bit. But indeed a dance on the deck of a ship is not like a dance in town——"

Yolande glanced around ; there was no one by.

" Dear Mrs. Graham," said she, " I have a secret to ask you. Do you think your brother would do me a great favour ? Dare I ask him ?"

"Why—yes—of course," said the other, with some hesitation and a little surprise. "Of course he would be delighted."

She could see that Yolande, at least, knew nothing of the fires of rage or jealousy she had kindled.

"I will tell you what it is, then. I wish my papa to think that I can manage—oh, everything!—when we go to the house in the Highlands. I wish that he may have no trouble or delay; that everything should be quite ready and quite right. Always he has said, 'Oh, you are a child; why do you want a house? Why should you have vexation?' But, dear Mrs. Graham, I do not mind the trouble at all; and I am filled with joy when I think of the time I am to go to the shops in Inverness; and papa will see that I can remember everything that is wanted; and he will have no bother at all; and he will see that I can look after a house, and then he will not be so afraid to take one in London or the country, and to have a proper home, as every one else has. And this is what I would ask of your brother, if he will be so very kind; he will be at Inverness before any of us, I suppose?"

"No doubt ; but why should you look so far ahead, Yolande, and trouble yourself?"

"It is no trouble ; it is a delight. You were speaking of the carriage we should want and the horses, to drive between Allt-nam-ba and the steamboat pier. Now all the other things that I have made a list of——"

"Already ?"

"When you were so good as to tell me them, I put them down on a sheet of paper —it is safer ; but the carriage : do you think I might ask your brother to hire that for us for the three months ? Then when papa goes to Inverness, there will be no bother or waiting; everything in readiness ; the carriage and horses engaged ; the dogs sent on before ; the cook at the lodge, with luncheon ready, or dinner, if it is late ; all the bedroom things nicely aired ; all right—everything right. Do you think I might ask Mr. Leslie ? Do you think he would be so kind ?"

"Oh, I am sure he would be delighted," said Mrs. Graham (with some little misgiving about Archie's existing mood). "I fancy he has promised to get your papa a couple of ponies for the game panniers ; and he might

as well get you a dog-cart at the same time. I should say a four-wheeled dog-cart and one stout serviceable horse would be best for you ; with perhaps a spring-cart and an additional pony—to trot in with the game to the steamer. But Archie will tell you. It sounds so strange to talk about such things—here. Jim and I had a chat about the Highlands this very morning."

"I will speak to your brother after breakfast, then."

But after breakfast, as it turned out, the Master of Lynn was nowhere to be found. Yolande wondered that he did not as usual come up to the hurricane-deck to play "Bull," or have a promenade with her ; but thought he was perhaps writing letters in the saloon, to be posted that night at Suez. She did not like to ask ; she only waited. She played "Bull" with her father, and got sadly beaten. She had a smart promenade with Colonel Graham, who told her some jungle stories ; but she was thinking of the Highlands all the time. She began to be impatient ; and set to work to devise letters, couched in such business phraseology as she knew, requesting

a firm of livery-stable keepers to state their terms for the hire of a dog-cart and horse for three months, the wages of the groom included.

There was no need to hurry. There had been some block in the Canal ; and the huge bulk of the ship was now lying idly in the midst of the Greater Bitter Lake. All around them was the wide plain of dazzling blue-green water ; and beyond that the ruddy brown strip of the desert quivered in the furnace-like heat ; while overhead shone the pale clear sky, cloudless and breathless. Yolande, as usual, wore neither hat nor bonnet ; but she was less reckless in venturing from under shelter of the awnings. And some of the old Anglo-Indians were hoping that the punkah-wallahs would be set to work at dinner-time.

The Master of Lynn had not shown up at breakfast ; but he made his appearance at lunch ; and he greeted Yolande with a cold “Good-morning,” and a still colder bow. Yolande, in truth, did not notice any change in his manner at first ; but by and by she could not fail to perceive that he addressed

the whole of his conversation to Colonel Graham, and that he had not a single word for her, though he was sitting right opposite to her. Well, she thought, perhaps this question as to whether they were to get through to Suez that evening was really very important. It did not much matter to her. She was more interested in Inverness than in Suez ; and among the most prized of her possessions was a long list of things necessary for a shooting-lodge, apart from the supplies which she was to send from the Army and Navy Stores. She felt she was no longer a schoolgirl ; nor even a useless and idle wanderer. Her father should see what she could do. Was he aware that she knew that ordinary blacking was useless for shooting boots ; and that she had got “dubbing” down in her list ?

“Archie,” said Mrs. Graham to her brother, the first time she got hold of him after lunch ; “you need not be rude to Miss Winterbourne.”

“I hope I have not been,” said he, somewhat stiffly.

“You treated her as if she were an absolute stranger at lunch. Not that I suppose

she cares. But, for your own sake, you might show better manners."

"I think you mistake the situation," said he, with apparent indifference. "'Do as you're done by' is a very good motto. It is for her to say whether we are to be friends, acquaintances, or strangers: and if she chooses to treat you on the least favoured nation scale, I suppose you've got to accept that. It is for her to choose. It is a free country."

"I think you are behaving abominably. I suppose you are jealous of those young officers; men who are not in the army always are; they know women like a man who can fight——"

"Fight! Smoke cigarettes and play six-penny Nap, you mean! That's about all the fighting they've ever done!"

"Do you say that about Jim?" said the young wife, with a flash of indignation in her eyes. "Why——"

"I wasn't aware that Graham was a candidate for Miss Winterbourne's favours," said he.

"Well, now," she said, "you are making

a fool of yourself, all to no purpose. If you are jealous of them, won't you be rid of the whole lot of them to-night, supposing we get to Suez? And we shall be all by ourselves after that; and I am sure I expected we should make such a pleasant and friendly party."

"But I am quite willing," said he. "If I meet Miss Winterbourne on terms of her own choosing, surely that is only leaving her the liberty she is entitled to. There is no quarrel, Polly. Don't be aghast. If Miss Winterbourne wishes to be friendly, good and well; if not, good and better. No bones will be broken."

"I tell you this, at least," said his sister, as a parting warning or entreaty, "that she is perfectly unconscious of having given you any offence. She has been anxious to speak to you all day, to ask you for a favour. She wants you to hire a dog-cart and a spring-cart for them, when you go to Inverness. If she thought there was anything the matter, would she ask a favour of you?"

"There is nothing the matter," he rejoined, with perfect equanimity. "And I am quite

willing to hire any number of dog-carts for her—when she asks me."

But, oddly enough, whether it was that Yolande had detected something unusual in his manner, or whether that item in her list of preparations had for the moment escaped her memory, or whether it was that the ship had again started, and everybody was eagerly looking forward to reaching Suez that night, nothing further was then said of the request that Yolande had intended to make. Indeed, she had but little opportunity of speaking to him that afternoon ; for most of her time was taken up in finally getting ready for quitting the big steamer, and in helping Mrs. Graham to do likewise. When they did reach Suez, it was just dinner-time, and that meal was rather hurried over ; for there were many good-byes to be said, and people could be got at more easily on deck.

The clear hot evening was sinking into the sudden darkness of the Egyptian night when the Grahams and Winterournes got into the railway carriage that was to take them along to the hotel ; and a whole crowd of passengers had come ashore to bid them

a last good-bye, amongst them notably the young Highland officers.

“Lucky beggars!” said Colonel Graham, rather ruefully. “Don’t you wish you were going out, Polly? Wouldn’t you like to be going out again?”

“Not I. Think of dear Baby, Jim!”

“By Jove!” said he, “if Colin Mackenzie were here with his pipes to play *The Barren Rocks of Aden*, I believe I’d go. I believe nothing could keep me.”

And so they bade good-bye to those boys; and Mrs. Graham and Yolande found themselves overladen with fruit and flowers when the train started. They were tired after so much excitement, and very soon went to bed after reaching the hotel.

Next morning they set out for Cairo; the Master quite courteous, in a reserved kind of way; his sister inwardly chafing; Yolande perhaps a trifle puzzled. Colonel Graham and Mr. Winterbourne, on the other hand, knowing nothing of these subtle matters, were wholly engrossed by the sights without. For though at first there was nothing but the vast monotony of the Desert—a blazing

stretch of sun-brown, with perhaps, now and again, a string of camels looking quite black on the far horizon-line—that in time gave way to the wide and fertile plains of the Nile valley. Slowly enough the train made its way through these teeming plains, with all their strange features of Eastern life—the mud-built villages among the palms; herds of buffaloes coming down to wallow in the river; oxen trampling out the corn in the open; camels slowly pacing along in Indian file, or here and there tethered to a tree; strange birds flying over the interminable breadths of golden grain. And, of course, when they reached Cairo, that wonderful city was still more bewildering to European eyes—the picturesque forms and brilliant costumes; the gaily caparisoned donkeys, ridden by veiled women, whose black eyes gleamed as they passed; the bare-legged runner, with his long wand clearing the way for his master on horseback; the swarthy Arabs leading their slow-moving camels; and side by side with the mosques and minarets and Moorish houses, the French-looking cafés and shops, to say nothing of the French-looking public

gardens, with the European servant-maids and children listening to tinkling music from the latest Parisian comic opera.

Then they got them to a large hotel, fronting these public gardens, the spacious hall and corridors of which were gratefully cool ; while outside there was such a mass of verdure—flowering shrubs and palms, wide-leaved bananas, and here and there a giant eucalyptus—as was exceedingly pleasant to eyes long accustomed to only the blue of the sea and the yellow-white of the deck. Moreover they were in ample time for the *table d'hôte* ; and every one, after the dust and heat, was glad to have a thorough change of raiment.

When the guests assembled in the long and lofty dining-saloon (there were not many, for most of the Spring tourists had already left, while many of the European residents in Cairo had gone away, anticipating political troubles), it was clear that Mrs. Graham and her younger companion had taken the opportunity of donning a shore toilette. Mrs. Graham's costume was certainly striking ; it was a deep crimsons, of some richly-brocaded

stuff; and she had some red flowers in her black hair. Yolande's was simpler: the gown a muslin of white or nearly white; and the only colour she wore was a bit of light salmon-coloured silk that came round her neck, and was fastened in a bow in front. She had nothing in her hair; but the light falling on it from above was sufficient, and even glorious, adornment. For jewellery she had two small earrings, each composed of minute points of pale turquoise; perhaps these only served to show more clearly the exquisite purity of her complexion, where the soft oval of the cheek met the ear.

"By heavens," the Master of Lynn said to himself, the moment he had seen her come in at the wide door, "that girl is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen!"

He was startled into renewed admiration of her. He could not keep his eyes away from her; he found himself listening with a quick sympathy and approval when she spoke; and as her face was all lit up with excitement and gladness because of the strange things she had seen, he followed her varying expressions, and found himself being help-

lessly drawn under a witchery which he could not, and did not strive much, to withstand. She spoke mostly—and she was pleasantly excited and talkative this evening—to her father and to Mrs. Graham; but sometimes, perhaps inadvertently, she glanced his way as she spoke, and then he eagerly agreed with what she was saying before he knew what it was. She, at least, had no covert quarrel with him or with any one else. Delight shone in her eyes. When she laughed it was like music. Even her father thought that she was looking unusually bright and happy; and so that made him very contented, too; but his satisfaction took the form of humorous grumbling; and he declared that he didn't know what she was made of—that she should be making merry after the long day's heat and dust, that had nearly killed every one else.

After dinner they all flocked into the reading-room, anxious to have a look at the English papers—all except the Master of Lynn, who left the hotel, and was absent for a little time. When he returned he went into the reading-room, and (with a certain timidity) went up to Yolande.

"Miss Winterbourne," said he, not very loudly, "wouldn't it be pleasanter for you to sit outside and see the people passing? It is very interesting; and they are playing music in the gardens. It is much cooler out-of-doors."

"Oh yes," said Yolande, without the least hesitation; and instantly she rose and walked out, just as she was, on to the terrace, he modestly attending her. He brought her a chair, and she sat down by the railings to watch the picturesque crowd. She spoke to him just in her usual way.

"Miss Winterbourne," said he, at length, "I have got you a little case of attar of roses; will you take it? When you get home, if you put it in your wardrobe, it will last a long time; and it is sure to remind you of Cairo."

"When I get home?" she repeated, rather sadly. "I have no home. I do not understand it. I do not understand why my papa should not have a home, as other people have."

"Well, then, will you take it to Allt-nam-ba?" said he. "That will be your home for a while."

At the mere mention of the place her face brightened up.

"Oh yes," she said, in the most friendly way, "that will indeed be a home for us for a while. Oh, thank you—it is very kind of you; I shall prize it very much——"

"And Polly was saying you wanted me to take some commissions for you to Inverness," said he, abasing himself to the uttermost. "I should be awfully glad. I should be delighted——"

"Oh, will you?" she said—and she rewarded him with an upward glance of gratitude that drove Cairo, and Inverness, and dog-carts, and everything else, clean out of his head. "And you are not anxious to read the newspapers?"

"No—not at all."

"Then will you sit down and tell me a little more about Allt-nam-ba? Ah, you do not know how I look forward to it. If it is only for three months, still it is a home, as you say—all to ourselves; and my papa and I have never been together like that before. I am so glad to think of it; and I am frightened, too, in case I do anything wrong; but

your sister has been very kind to me. And there is another thing—if I make mistakes at the beginning—well I believe my papa does not know how to be angry with me."

"Well, I should think not—I should think not, indeed!" said he, as if it were quite an impossible thing for anybody to be angry with Yolande.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE NIGHT.

HE had at last discovered an easy way of gaining her favour. She was so anxious to prove to her father that she was a capable house-mistress that she was profoundly grateful for any hint that might help; and she spared neither time nor trouble in acquiring the most minute information. Then all this had to be done in a more or less secret fashion. She wished the arrangements at the shooting-lodge to be something of a surprise. Her father, on getting up to Inverness-shire, was to find everything in perfect order; then he would see whether or not she was fit to manage a house. She had even decided (after serious consultation with the Master of Lynn) that when the gillies went up the hill with the shooting-party, she would give them their lunch rather than the meaner alternative of a shilling a piece; and when the Master

suggested that oatcake and cheese were quite sufficient for that, she said no—that, as her father, she knew, would not have either whisky or beer about the place, she would make it up to the men in giving them a good meal.

This decision was arrived at, of all places in the world, in the gimcrack wooden building that Ismail had put up at the foot of the Great Pyramid for the reception of his guests. The Grahams and Winterbournes had, as a matter of course, driven out to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx; but when there was a talk of their climbing to the top of the Great Pyramid, Yolande flatly refused to be hauled about by the Arabs; so that Mrs. Graham (who had her little ambitions) and her husband and Mr. Winterbourne started by themselves, leaving the Master of Lynn, who eagerly accepted the duty, to keep Yolande company. And so these two were now sitting well content in this big, bare, cool apartment, the chief ornament of which was a series of pictures on the wall—landscapes, in fact, so large and wild and vehement in colour that one momentarily

expected to hear a sharp whistle, followed by carpenters rushing in to run them off the stage.

"I suppose, Miss Winterbourne," said he (it was an odd kind of conversation to take place at the foot of the Great Pyramid), "your father would like to kill a few red-deer while he is at Allt-nam-ba?"

"Oh yes; I know he is looking forward to that."

"Do you think," said he, with a peculiar smile, "that it would be very wicked and monstrous if I were to sacrifice my father's interests to your father's interests? I should think not, myself. There are two fathers in the case; what one loses the other gains."

"I do not understand you," Yolande said.

"Well, this is the point. What deer may be found in the Allt-nam-ba gullies will most likely go in from our forest. Sometimes they cross from Sir John's; but I fancy our forest contributes most of them; they like to nibble a little at the bushes for a change; and, indeed, in very wild weather they are sometimes driven down from the forest to get shelter among the trees. Oh, don't you

know?" he broke in, noticing some expression of her eyes. "There are no trees in a deer-forest—none at all—except perhaps a few stunted birches down in the corries. Well, you see, as the deer go in from our forest into your gullies, it is our interest that they should be driven out again, and it is your interest that they should stay. And I don't think they will stay if there is not a glass of whisky about the place; that was the hint I meant to give you, Miss Winterbourne."

"But I don't understand yet," said Yolande. "Whisky?"

"All your father's chances at the deer will depend on the goodwill of the shepherds. The fact is we put some sheep on Allt-nam-ba, mostly as a fence to the forest; there is no pasturage to speak of; but, of course, the coming and going of the shepherds and the dogs drive the deer back. Now supposing—just listen to me betraying my father's interests and my own—supposing there is an occasional glass of whisky about, and that the shepherds are on very friendly terms with you; then not only are they the first to know

when a good stag has come about, but they might keep themselves and their dogs down in the bothy until your father had gone out with his rifle. Now do you see?"

"Oh yes ; oh yes!" said Yolande, eagerly. "It is very kind of you. But what am I to do? My father would not have whisky in the house—oh, never, never—not for all the deer in the country. Yet it is sad—it is provoking—I should be so proud if he were to get some beautiful fine horns to be hung up in the hall, when we take a house some day. It is very, very, very, provoking."

"There is another way," said he, quietly, "as the cookery book says. You need not have whisky in the house. You might order a gallon or two in Inverness and give it in charge to Duncan the keeper. He would have it in his bothy, and would know what to do with it."

Out came her note-book in a second : *Two gallons of whisky addressed to Mr. Duncan Macdonald, gamekeeper, Allt-nam-ba, with note explaining.* At the same moment the dragoman entered the room to prepare lunch ; and a glance out of the window

showed them the other members of the party at the foot of that great blazing mass of ruddy-yellow that rose away into the pale-blue Egyptian sky.

"Mind you, don't say I have had anything to do with it," said he (and he was quite pleased that this little secret existed between them). "My father would think I was mad in giving you these hints. But yet I don't think it is good policy to be so niggardly. If your father kills three or four stags this year, the forest will be none the worse, and Allt-nam-ba will let all the more easily another season. And I hope it is not the last time we shall have you as neighbours."

She did not answer the implied question ; for now the other members of the party entered the room, breathless and hot and fatigued, but glad to be able to shut back at last the clamouring horde of Arabs who were still heard protesting and vociferating without.

That same evening they left Cairo by the night train for Asyoot, where the dahabeeah of the Governor of Merhadj was awaiting them ; and for their greater convenience they

took their dinner with them. That scrambled meal in the railway-carriage was something of an amusement; and in the midst of it all the young Master of Lynn would insist on Yolande's having a little wine. She refused at first, merely as her ordinary habit was; but when he learned that she had never tasted wine at all, of any kind whatever, he begged of her still more urgently to have the smallest possible quantity.

"It will make you sleep, Miss Winterbourne," said he, "and you know how distressing a wakeful night journey is."

"Oh no," she said, with a smile. "Not at all. There is to be moonlight, and why should not one lie awake? My papa wished me not to drink wine, and so I have not; and I have never thought about it. The ladies at the Château scarcely took any; they said it was not any better than water."

"But fancy you never having tasted it at all!" he said, and then he turned to her father. "Mr. Winterbourne, will you give Miss Yolande permission to take a very little wine—to taste it?"

The reply of her father was singular.

"I would sooner see her drink Prussic acid—then the end would be at once," said he.

Now this answer was so abrupt, and apparently so unnecessarily harsh, that the Master of Lynn, not knowing what blunder he had made, immediately strove to change the subject; and the most agreeable thing he could think of, to mention to Yolande's father, was the slaying of stags.

"While you were going up the Great Pyramid this morning, Mr. Winterbourne," said he, "we were talking about what you were likely to do at Allt-nam-ba; and I was telling your daughter I hoped you would get a stag or two."

"Yes?—oh yes," said Mr. Winterbourne, apparently recalling himself from some reverie by an effort of will. "A stag? I hope so. Oh yes, I hope so. We will keep a sharp look-out."

"Miss Winterbourne," said the younger man, with a significant glance at her which seemed to remind her that they had a secret in common, "was surprised to hear that there were no trees in a deer-forest. But her

ignorance was very excusable. How could she know? It wasn't half as bad as the talk of those fellows in Parliament and the newspapers, who howl because the deer-forests are not given over to sheep, or to cattle, or turned into small crofts. Goodness gracious, I wonder if any one of them ever saw a deer-forest? Miss Winterbourne, that will be something for you to see—the solitude and desolation of the forest—mile after mile of the same moorland and hill without a sound, or the sight of a living thing——”

“ But is not that their complaint—that so much land is taken away, and not for people to live on?” said Yolande, who had stumbled on this subject somewhere in following her father's Parliamentary career.

“ Yes,” said he, ironically; “ I wonder what they'd find there to live on. They'd find granite boulders, and withered moss, and a hard grass that sheep won't touch, and that cattle won't touch, and that even mountain hares would starve on. The deer is the only living animal that can make anything of it; and even he is fond of getting into the gullies to have a nibble at the birch-trees.

I wish those Radical fellows knew something of what they were talking about, before making all that fuss about the Game Laws. The Game Laws won't hurt you, if you choose to keep from thieving."

"But you are a Liberal, are you not?" said Yolande, with wide open eyes. Of course, she concluded that any one claiming the friendship of her father and herself must needs be a Liberal. Travelling in the same party, too: why——

Well, it was fortunate for the Master that he found himself absolved from replying; for Mr. Winterbourne broke in, with a sardonic kind of smile on his face.

"That is a very good remark of yours, Mr. Leslie," said he; "a very good remark indeed. I have something of the same belief myself, though I shock some of my friends by saying so. I am for having pretty stringent laws all round; and the best defence for them is this—that you need not break them unless you choose. It may be morally wrong to hang a man for stealing a sheep; but all you have got to do is not to steal the sheep. Well, if I pay seven hundred and

fifty pounds for a shooting, and you come on my land and steal my birds, I don't care what may happen to you. The laws may be a little severe; but your best plan would have been to earn your living in a decent way, instead of becoming an idle, sneaking, lying, and thieving poacher — ”

“ Oh certainly, certainly,” said the younger man, with great warmth.

“ That is my belief, at all events,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with the same curious sort of smile; “ and it answers two ends: it enables me to approve my gamekeeper for the time being, when otherwise I might think he was just a little too zealous; and also it serves to make some friends of mine in the House very wild; and you know there is nothing so deplorable as lethargy.”

“ But you are a Liberal, Mr. Leslie, are you not?” repeated Yolande.

And here again he was saved—by the ready wit of his sister.

“ My dearest Yolande, what are you talking about!” she said. “ What these two have been saying would make a Liberal

or a Radical jump out of his five senses—or is it seven? Is it seven, Jim?"

"I don't know," her husband said, lazily. "Five are quite enough for a Radical."

"I know I used to have a great sympathy with poachers," continued pretty Mrs. Graham. "It always seemed to me romantic—I mean, when you read about the poacher in poems—his love of sport, you know ——"

"His love of sport!" her husband growled, contemptuously. "A miserable, sneaking fellow loafing about the public-house all day, and then stealing out at night with his ferrets and his nets to snare rabbits for the market. A love of sport!——"

"Oh, but I can remember," said she, stoutly, "when I was a girl, there were other stories than that. That is the English poacher. I can remember when it was quite well known that the Badenoch young fellows were coming into the forest for a deer; and it was winked at by everybody when they did not come more than twice or thrice in the year. And that was not for the market. Anybody could have a bit of venison who wanted; and I have heard that there was a

fine odour of cooking in the shepherds' bothies just about that time."

"That has nothing to do with the Game-Laws," her husband said, curtly. "I doubt whether deer are protected by the Game Laws at all. I think it is only a question of trespass. But I quite agree with Mr. Winterbourne: if laws are too severe, your best plan is not to break them."

"Well, I was cured of my sympathy on one occasion," said Mrs. Graham, cheerfully (having warded off danger from her brother). "Do you remember, Jim? You and I were driving down Glenstroy, and we came on some gypsies. They had a tent by the roadside; and you know, dear Yolande, I wasn't an old married woman in those days, and grown suspicious; and I thought it would be nice to stop and speak to the poor people and give them some money to get proper food when they reached a village. Do you know what Jim said?—'Money for food? Most likely they are plucking a brace of my uncle's black game.' Well, they were not. We got down from the trap; and went into the little tent; and they weren't plucking

a brace of black game ; but they were cooking two hen pheasants on a spit ; as comfortable as might be. I suppose a gypsy wouldn't do much good as a deer-stalker, though ? ”

And while they thus sat and chatted about the far northern wilds (Yolande was deeply interested ; and the Master of Lynn perceived that ; and he had himself an abundance of experience about deer) the sunset went, and presently, and almost suddenly, they found themselves in the intense blackness of the tropical night. When, from time to time, they looked out of the window, they could see nothing at all of the world around ; though Jupiter and Venus were shining clear and high in the western heavens, and Orion's jewels were paling as they sank ; and away in the south, near the horizon, the solitary Sirius gleamed. But as the night went on (and they were still talking of Scotland) a pale light—a sort of faint yellow smoke—appeared in the south-east ; and then a sharp, keen glint of gold revealed the edge of the moon. The light grew and spread up into the sky ; and now the world around them was

no longer an indistinguishable mass of black ; its various features became distinct as the soft radiance became fuller and fuller ; and by and by they could make out the walls of the sleeping villages, with their strange shadows, and the tall palms that threw reflections down on the smooth and ghostly water. Can anything be more solemn than moonlight on a grove of palms—the weird darkness of them, the silence, the consciousness that all around lies the white, still desert ? Yolande's fancies were no longer far away ; this silent, moonlit world out there was a strange thing.

Then, one by one, the occupants of the railway-carriage dropped off to sleep ; and Yolande slept too, turning her face into the window-corner somewhat, and letting her hands sink placidly into her lap. He did not sleep ; how could he ? He had some vague idea that he ought to be guardian over her ; and then—as he timidly regarded the perfect lines of her forehead and chin and throat, and the delicacy of the small ear, and the sweep of the soft lashes—he wondered that this beautiful creature should have been so long in the world and he wasting the years

in ignorance ; and then (for with youth there is little diffidence; it is always “I have chosen; you are mine; you cannot be any other than mine”) he thought of her as the mistress of Lynn Towers. In black velvet, would she not look handsome, seated at the head of the dinner-table ; or in a tall-backed chair by the fireplace, with the red glow from the birch-logs and the peat making glimmerings on her hair ? He thought of her driving down the Glen ; on the steamboat quay ; on board the steamboat ; in the streets of Inverness ; and he knew that nowhere could she have any rival.

And then it occurred to him that what air was made by the motion of the train must be blowing in upon her face, and that the sand-blinds of the windows were not sufficient protection ; and he thought he could rig up something that would more effectually shield her. So, in the silence and the semi-darkness he stealthily got hold of a light shawl of his sister’s, and set to work to fasten one end to the top of the carriage-door and the other to the netting for the handbags, in order to form some kind of screen. This manœuvre

took some time, for he was anxious not to waken any one ; and, as he was standing up, he had to balance himself carefully, for the railway-carriage jolted considerably. But at last he got it fixed ; and he was just moving the lower corner of the screen, so that it should not be too close to her head, when, by some wild and fearful accident, the back of his hand happened to touch her hair. It was the lightest of touches ; but it was like an electric shock ; he paused, breathless ; he was quite unnerved ; he did not know whether to retreat or wait ; it was as if something had stung him and benumbed his senses. And light as the touch was it awoke her. Her eyes opened ; and there was a sudden fear and bewilderment in them when she saw him standing over her ; but the next second she perceived what he had been doing for her ; and kindness and thanks were instantly his reward.

“Oh, thank you—thank you,” she said, with smiling eyes ; and he was glad to get back into his own corner, and to think over this that had happened, and to wonder at the sudden fear that had paralysed him. At all events, he had not offended her.

The dawn arose in the east ; the cold clear blue giving way to a mystic gray ; but still the moon shone palely on the palms, and on the water, and the silent plains. And still she slept ; and he was wondering whether she was dreaming of the far North, and of the place that she longed to make a home of, if only for the briefest space. And what if this new day—that was spreading up and up, and fighting the pallid moonlight, and bringing with it colour and life to brighten the awakening world—what if this new day were to bring with it a new courage ; and he were to hint to her—or even to tell her plainly—that this pathetic hope of hers was of easy accomplishment ; and that, after their stay at Allt-nam-ba, if it grieved her to think of leaving the place that she had first thought to make a home of, there was another home there that would be proud and glad to welcome her, not for two months or for three months, but for the length of her life ? Why should not Mr. Winterbourne be free to follow out his political career ? He had gathered from Yolande that she considered herself a most unfortunate drag and encumbrance on her

father ; was not this a happy solution of all possible difficulties ? In black velvet, more especially, Yolande would look so handsome in the dining-room at Lynn Towers.

CHAPTER XI.

ISOLATION.

AND as for Mr. Winterbourne himself? Well, he was not blind. He could see as far ahead as any of them. If his imagination was not captured by any picture of Yolande in black velvet, and if he knew nothing about the desirability of buying back Corrievreak, his hope and prayer for the future was clear and definite enough. To secure for Yolande a peaceful, safe, and happy life—that was his one aim and thought; and already he clearly recognised, and in his own mind strove to make light of in a sadly humorous way, the necessity of a separation between him and her. It was the way of the world—why should he complain? If she was securely settled in life, that would be enough happiness for him. And this young fellow, who was paying her so much obvious attention, was a nice enough young fellow, as things

went; of good birth and breeding, well-mannered, good-natured, and otherwise unobjectionable. And Yolande seemed to be on the most friendly terms with him.

But even now it was a strange thing to find himself being ousted, in however slight a degree, from Yolande's companionship. It was his own doing; and he knew it; and he knew that he was acting wisely in preparing himself by small degrees for the inevitable: and yet he had to confess to himself that the operation was not a pleasant one. Then it was a slow process. Yolande herself did not notice how, whether they were in the Cairo bazaars or in the balcony at the hotel, her father managed to hang back a little; and how the Master of Lynn had come quite naturally to take his place; and how it was the latter, and not the former, who knew where her travelling bag was, and called her maid for her, and bought her fruit at the stations. On this very morning, for example, on their arrival at Asyoot, when they had seen their luggage packed on the camels' backs by the tall and swarthy Arabs, and when they set out to walk down to the Nile,

over the burning sands, it was, as usual, Mr. Leslie who happened to be her companion. Her father had lingered behind, under pretence of once more counting over the articles of luggage along with Ahmed the dragoman ; and when he overtook the other members of the party it was the Grahams that he chose to accompany. Mrs. Graham was complaining of the discomfort of travelling by night, and declaring that she would not undertake such another journey to avoid all the heat that ever was heard of; and her husband was observing, with the candour of husbands, that her hair certainly did look like a hay-rick in a gale of wind.

“There’s Archie,” she said, glancing at the two figures in front of them, “he’s always spick and span. No matter what happens, he always looks as if he’d come out of a band-box.”

“And a very proper thing, too,” said Mr. Winterbourne. “To be careless about one’s appearance is no great compliment to one’s companions. Mrs. Graham,” he added, in his timid and nervous way, “I wish you would tell me frankly—you see, there is

scarcely any one I ask—would you tell me honestly if you think that Yolande dresses fairly well?"

"Oh, I think she dresses charmingly," said pretty Mrs. Graham, in the most good-natured way. "Quite charmingly. She is so very original."

"But I don't want her to be original," he said, with a slight touch of querulousness. "That is just it. I want her to go to the very best places, and get what is most correct, and not to mind about the cost of it. I don't care about the cost of it; we have no establishment to keep up; no horses or anything of the kind; and why should she be so particular about the cost of this or that? Really, Mrs. Graham, it would be so kind of you to give her a word of advice——"

"Oh, but dear Yolande and I have had long talks about that already, you know, Mr. Winterbourne," said she. "Do you suppose two women could be so much together without? And I know what she thinks. First and foremost, she wears what she thinks will please you; and I think she is rather clever at finding out what you like."

"Oh, but that is absurd," said he, peevishly. "What do I know about it? Sometimes I have made suggestions; but—but I want her to be well dressed——"

"I would not blame her much for being economical," said Mrs. Graham, with a smile. "It is a very useful quality in a girl. She might marry a poor man, you know."

He glanced at her, with a sort of fright in his eyes.

"Oh, but she will never marry any one who—whose position would cause her embarrassments of that kind," he said, hastily. "Oh no. I do not value money much; but she must never be subjected to embarrassments. Besides, I can provide against that. That, at least, is one of the troubles of life she will be safe from. I hope there is no fear of that in her mind."

"Oh probably not, doubtless not," Mrs. Graham said, cheerfully; for she was sorry to have caused this alarm by a chance remark. "And you know I promised on board ship to buy a lot of silks and things for Yolande when we are going home again through Cairo——"

"And silver," he suggested. "She ought to have different belts and bracelets and things of that kind. I suppose Cairo might not be the best place for getting some more expensive jewellery, would it, do you think? Yolande ought to have more jewellery. She is a woman now. Her schoolgirl trinkets were all very well; but now she is a woman she must have some proper jewellery——"

"If I were Yolande," said Mrs. Graham, demurely, "and if I had a very generous papa, I think I know what I should do."

"What, then?" said he, with his eyes brightening; for to give something to Yolande likely to please her was one of the gladnesses of his life—perhaps even the chief.

"I would take him to a shop in Cairo—Abderahman, was it?—and I would ask him just to look again at that wonderful piece of Syrian embroidery——"

"I remember," said he, quickly. "I remember quite well. Of course she shall have it! I had no idea she cared for it."

"Do you think any living woman could look at it without coveting it with her whole

soul? But she was not likely to say that to you. It was horribly expensive—I forgot how much."

"She shall have it," he said briefly.

"It would make the loveliest opera-cloak," she suggested.

"An opera-cloak?" he repeated, with a sudden change of manner.

"It would be perfectly gorgeous," she said.

"Oh, but I don't think she will want an opera-cloak," said he, coldly. "It would be a pity. It would be throwing it away."

"Are you never going to take her to the theatre, then?" said Mrs. Graham, with a stare.

"I hope Yolande will not live much in cities," said he, somewhat hastily, and evidently wishing to get rid of the subject. "She has lived always in the country—look at the health of her cheeks. I hope she will never live in a city; she will live a far quieter and happier life in the country; and she will do very well without theatres or anything of the kind."

Then he seemed to think he had been

unnecessarily harsh in his refusal; and so he said, in a lighter way—

“No, no; I have my own plans, Mrs. Graham. I want to induce a very estimable lady to persuade that girl of mine into buying a lot of things that are necessary for her, now that she is a young woman. And I want a bribe for the purpose; and I have discovered that she has a fancy for a piece of Syrian needlework. Very well—now, I am going to have my own way, and there is no use protesting—you are going to take that piece of embroidery home with you; and you will make something of it at Inverstroy; and perhaps Yolande and I will pay you a visit some day—if it is not too far to drive from Alltnam-ba—and then we shall see how a bit of Cairo looks in Inverness-shire.”

They could not pursue the subject further; for they now found themselves on the landing-stage by the side of the river; and there was a fearful shouting and yelling over the unloading of the luggage from the camels' backs. But from this Babel of confusion there was an easy escape. Among all the trading vessels moored by the river's bank,

there was but one dahabeeah (the tourist season being long over); and they made no doubt that this gaily coloured thing—looking like a huge state barge, but with long yards sweeping up to the sky both at the bow and astern—was the vessel which the Governor of Merhadj had sent for them. They eyed it, every feature of it, curiously—the rows of the cabin windows with their sun-blinds of a most vivid green; the vast awning on the upper deck; the enormous yellow dragon at the prow; and everywhere a blaze of gaudy colours, blue and white. And while they were thus examining it, a tall and grave person, in a white turban and garment of sombre black, who proved to be the captain, came ashore; and, after a word or two in Arabic with Ahmed, came up to Colonel Graham, and respectfully presented him with a letter.

“Hello,” said he, “this is from young Ismat. Rather queer English. He is in ‘an abysm of despair.’ Father gone into the interior—important meeting with some Sheiks—despairs he must remain in Merhadj—hopes to see us when we come up—hopes

we shall find the dahabeeah comfortable—has heard of Ahmed—very good man—hopes we bring good news from Cairo—if we are at all afraid, his father will give us a guard of soldiers——what the mischief does he mean? Come on, Polly: let's go and take possession."

And indeed it was with great delight that they got away from the noise and bustle, the heat and dust, of the outer world into the spacious and cool interior of this barge; and great was their curiosity in exploring cabin after cabin, and finding each one more like a little French boudoir—in a cheapish kind of style — than anything else. There was nothing at all Eastern about the fittings or decoration of this dahabeeah, except a green and scarlet rug here and there; the saloons and state-rooms were all of white and gold, with flimsy French-looking mirrors, and French-looking little curtains, and aniline-dyed table-covers and sofa-cushions. But everything was very clean and bright and cool; and the circular open space at the stern was a veritable Belvedere, from which, sitting in the shade, they could gaze abroad on the

wide yellow green waters of the Nile, and on the picturesque scenes along the banks ; and when, in due course, breakfast was brought them—an interminable meal, with three or four kinds of wine on the table—they forgot that the *menu* and the dishes were French, when their attendant was an Albanian-looking person in embroidered cap and baggy breeches of yellow silk, and when they heard, outside, the hoarse chorus of a Nubian crew labouring at the long oars of one of the trading boats.

Then they went away to their respective cabins to see about the unpacking of their luggage ; and at the same time the Reis Mustapha and his swarthy crew began to unfurl the vast breadth of sail on the forward yard, for the north wind was now blowing steady and fair. And then, by and by, when the members of the party assembled again—on the upper deck, under the wide awning—they found that they were out in the shallow lake-like waters of the Nile, the mighty sail in front of them bellying out and straining at the sheets, and a rippling sound at the prow making a soft and monotonous music.

And there were the well-known and monotonous features of the famous river : the brown mud-walled villages ; the dark green palms with their branches slowly moving in the breeze ; the arid wastes of sand ; the tall jet-black figures of the Arabs marching along with stately stride ; now and again the glimpse of a minaret telling of some town or village farther inland ; a group of fellahs, driving before them their horses, donkeys, and camels ; a drove of buffalo brought down to water themselves—nothing visible of each of them but a shining back, a snout, and a pair of horns busy with the flies ; goats sheltering themselves in the shadow of the sandbanks from the heat of the noonday sun ; unknown birds floating afar on the surface of the river or stalking unconcernedly along the yellow shoals ; and over all this abundant and curious life the pale distant heat-obscured turquoise blue of the African sky, so different from the deep and keen and quivering blue of the storm-washed atmospheres of the north.

"Well, now, Miss Yolande," said Colonel Graham, lying back in the cane-bottomed easy-chair, and carefully regarding the ash of

his cigar, "what do you think of Ahmed's arrangements? Are they satisfactory? Does the turmoil of Nile travel fatigue you; do the hardships oppress you? Of course, you cannot expect to penetrate the deserts of Africa without suffering privations. I hope the meagre fare will not make a skeleton of you. The rude accommodation of these cabins——"

"Oh, I think everything is delightful," said she, "and this cool wind is delicious."

But then she fixed her eyes on him solemnly.

"I wished to ask a question, however, Colonel Graham. Did you hear a shriek? No? Well, this is the question: I found a cockroach in one of the drawers as big as —as—well, I thought it was an alligator out of the river—you did not hear Jane shriek? —and I would like to know if all the beasts are similar in proportion——"

"My dear child!" broke in Mrs. Graham. "Thank goodness you know nothing about it—you never were in India. Here you haven't to twitch off the bed-clothes before going to bed to make sure that there isn't a

snake waiting for you. Why, what is there here? Nothing. The heat is bad; but it is dry: it does not sap the life out of you like the Indian heat. The flies worry; but they are not nearly so bad if you don't lose your temper. The mosquitoes are pretty considerable, I admit; but you have your Levinge— — ”

“ Do you think I was complaining ? ” exclaimed Yolande. “ Complaining ? —as we are now ! ”

“ No, it was Jim, I daresay,” said the other, most gratuitously. “ Men always do complain, because they have so little to complain about. But it would take an AI complainer to find anything wrong with a day like this, or with such a pleasant setting-out; and I do hope, Jim, you will be civil for once, and let that young fellow and his father know how much we are obliged to them for the loan of the boat. They expect it, those Eastern people. They are not all grumpy, like Englishmen and Scotchmen. I do hope you'll be polite to him.”

“ All right,” said her husband, with his lazy good-nature, “ I'll Bismillah him within an inch of his life.”

So the calm and shining and dream-like day went pleasantly by, the slowly-moving panorama around them constantly offering objects of new interest. In the afternoon they passed some ranges of bare and arid limestone hills; and on the face of them—now catching a faint pink or lilac glow from the westering sun—they could make out the entrances of ancient tombs, placed high above all possible inundations. It was not far south of this portion of the river that the Reis resolved to come to an anchor; for the sunset (which was somewhat chromo-lithographic in character, like most of the atmospheric effects in Egypt) was of brief duration; and the twilight was even briefer; so that night, with all her stars, was upon them ere they had begun to think of preparing for dinner.

That was a pleasant enough meal, too, in the cheerful little saloon, the spurious colours of which were in a measure subdued by the yellow radiance of the swinging-lamp. The two women had put on their lightest and coolest and brightest costumes; and now, for the first time, perhaps, they recognised how completely the little group of them was shut

off from the world. On board ship they had plenty of neighbours; in hotels they sat at the *table d'hôte*; but here they were really a family party; and Colonel Graham, in addressing Yolande, dropped the "Miss" quite naturally, and it seemed as though these people had known each other all their lives through, and that they had come away for their holiday-trip, and were to be together until they returned again together to their proper home in the Highlands. The Grahams, indeed, talked as if they had already annexed and adopted Yolande.

After dinner they adjourned to the upper deck for the sake of coolness; and there coffee was brought them; and the women-folk lay idly in their rocking-chairs and used their fans; and the men lit their cigars. There was plenty of light; for two large swinging-lamps had been hung from the iron bars; and these threw a reddish-golden glow on the canvas of the awning and on the deck. But one had only to step to the side of the vessel, and look out from this yellow glare, to find all around the darkness and the silence of the desert, and overhead the solemn heavens

with their multitude of throbbing stars. The Nile could scarcely be heard as it ran swiftly and noiselessly and unseen beneath.

By and by the Master of Lynn, who had been leaning on the railing, and looking out into the clear, dark night, came back, and said to Yolande—

“ Miss Winterbourne, I wish you would come and look at this constellation. I think it is the Southern Cross. Do you know it? I think this must be the Southern Cross.”

She instantly rose and followed him to the side of the deck, where they were at some little distance from the others. They talked about the constellation, but could make nothing of it. Of course, what he had asked her to come there for was to fulfil his resolve of the night before—to hint to her that, if the charm of home had such great attractions for her, there was one home he knew that would be glad to welcome her and cherish her, now and throughout all her life. But some compunction seized him—some sudden qualm of conscience. The doubt occurred to him as to whether it was quite fair. It was like trying to steal away the affections of the girl;

and she the only daughter and companion of this solitary man. Ought he not to speak to her father first, and get to know what his plans were, and so be able to approach her in a franker way? Perhaps he might be able to gain Mr. Winterbourne's approval, and thus be thrice armed?

Yolande's father, who had regarded these two as they stood there by the rail, looking out into the starlit night, watched them as they came back again; and he looked at the girl with a strange and wistful look. Had she said "Yes" already? Was she going away from him? But there was no sign of any emotion on the fair young face—neither alarm nor concealment, nor maiden hesitation, nor anything of the sort. Quite frankly and naturally she came over to her father's chair, sat down beside him on the deck, and put her hand on his knee.

"I wish I knew a little more about the stars," she said.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONSPIRACY.

"I THINK I am doing what is right," the Master of Lynn said to his sister, of whom, in his perplexity, he was driven to take counsel.

They had once more resumed their idle, uneventful, dream-like voyage up the broad river; and the dahabeeah was large, and had many quiet corners for confidential conversations. Moreover, the monotony of the scene around them left them ample leisure. Their attention was seldom called away by any striking feature or incident; and never at all by any atmospheric phenomena. They had grown accustomed to the level plains of yellow sand, the distant low hills quivering in the heat, the wide, yellow-green waters ruffled by the northerly breeze, and the palms, and the mud villages, and the groups of swarthy Arabs or Nubians lazily driving

down the sheep and camel and buffalo to the banks of the stream. The pulse of the world beats slowly there.

"Yes, I think you are doing what is right —though not what is usual, perhaps," said his sister, regarding him.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well," she said, with a smile, "no doubt it is quite correct to ask the papa's permission first; it is quite according to rule and etiquette; but generally, I should think, some understanding exists——"

"But I am afraid to startle her," he said, quickly. "Besides, there might be some one else; and I would rather get to know that from her father."

"There is no one else," said pretty Mrs. Graham, sipping her tumbler of cold tea. "What is more, you are acting with greater prudence than I could have given you credit for. But I suppose you don't know; you don't understand."

"What's the conundrum now?" he asked, bluntly.

"Yolande and I have had some talk together," she said; and she regarded him with

an air of superior sagacity. "I happen to know what she thinks; and you are acting very prudently in going to her father first. She has been educated in France."

"What do you mean? Why don't you speak out?" he said, irritated by these women's ways of mystery.

"Is there any need? She has been educated in France; and she knows what her duty is. She will marry any one her father approves of. It is for him to arrange it. But there is something further in her case. Yolande is haunted by the fear that she is a burden and drag on her father—that she is taking him away from public life. And I think she is right. Why should he be here just now, for example? It is all very well for Jim and me to take a holiday; but for a member of the House of Commons to be continually leaving England to travel about as he and Yolande do—I don't understand it. It is absurd. Very well; if she once imagines that her father would like to see her married, so that he might attend to his own affairs, the way is clear. And it would be a very good thing. I like the girl. She sticks up

for her own ; whoever she marries won't have to blow his own trumpet. It would be a very good thing in many ways. I was saying to Jim only the other day that you might buy back Corrievreak."

"Do you think I want to marry her for her money ?" said he.

"Well, no. But she has money—or will have it. I daresay, now, if *Shena Ván*¹—"

"Leave Miss Stewart alone," said he, somewhat hotly.

She laughed,

"Poor girl! It wasn't her fault that she was born in a Scotch manse instead of being the daughter of a member of the House of Commons. But I think *Shena Ván*, with all her pretty eyes, had a bit of a temper, you know, Archie—"

"Leave her alone, will you," he said, roughly. "You have done her enough mischief."

"I ?" said Mrs. Graham, with a stare.

"Well never mind. That is done with. Why don't you have a turn at Miss Winterbourne? You and she appear to be great

¹ The proper spelling is Síne Bhan—Fair Janet.

friends ; and women can always say spiteful things about their nearest friends. Haven't you some nice things to say about her too ?"

"Wait till she is your wife, Archie, and then I will find out all manner of things against her. You have no idea how sharp a sister-in-law's eyes are."

However, this prospect had the immediate effect of removing his wrath ; he grew quite friendly and confidential again, and finally announced his resolve to speak to Mr. Winterbourne that very day.

"If the thing is impossible, it will be better to learn it from him. If I were to ask Yolande herself, and if she said no, look how awkward that would be for the rest of this trip. I'd have to go. No ; I'll have everything fair and above board ; and then no one can complain, whatever happens."

And yet the long, pleasant, idling day had passed before he had screwed up his courage to make the plunge. They had come to an anchor for the night ; the sun was sinking far away in the west ; along the low-lying eastern hills there was a flush of the pale ethereal pink. The women folk had disap-

peared to dress for dinner; Colonel Graham was at the stern of the dahabeeah, fishing; Mr. Winterbourne and he were alone on the upper deck; clearly it was an opportunity not to be missed. Nor, indeed, was there any difficulty, once the subject was mentioned. Yolande's father seemed inclined to meet the younger man half way, though there was more of resignation than of gladness in the way he spoke.

"Of course, everything depends on herself," he said, at length. "She must be guided by her own wishes——"

"Oh yes, certainly, certainly," said the younger man, with eagerness. "I would not let any consideratoin interfere with her perfect freedom of choice. That is not to be thought of——"

Mr. Winterbourne was scarcely heeding him; his thoughts were far away; and, when he spoke, it was to interrupt—a rudeness of which he was never consciously guilty.

"Yes, I should like to see Yolande settled in life," he said, absently. "There is no saying what might happen to me. Once or twice I have fancied my heart was affected—

but I would not have her imagine such a thing, remember; you must never mention it——”

“Oh, certainly not!”

“Very slight surprises are enough to give me pretty bad palpitation,” he continued, “and although it may be nothing serious, still—if Yolande were made quite happy and secure, my mind would be more at rest. I don’t say much about her, though I might. If you win her affection, you are not likely to lose it; she is staunch. And she has courage. If trouble should come to her or hers, she will not be the one to flinch.”

“But why should you anticipate trouble?” said the Master of Lynn, who was very much excited and joyous, and almost eager to go away and ask Yolande at once. “I can see nothing but a pleasant and happy life for her. Of course, sickness may come to any one; but it is less likely to fall on her than any one I know. Why, to look at her——”

“She ought always to live in the country,” said Mr. Winterbourne, quickly, and he glanced at his companion in an inquiring sort of way. “I hope she will never live in a

town—the peace and quiet of the country are what I should wish for her always. She does not care for society. Her own small circle is enough for her; that is where she is best seen; it is there you get to know her—and—and to love her. Well, perhaps I shouldn't talk about her. She and I have been pretty close companions. It will seem strange to me, at first, that she should belong to some one else; but—but it is right; it is in the natural course of things. I shall be content if I know that she is being treated with kindness and affection—and with a little consideration for her youth. Perhaps she will make mistakes, as a young wife; but she is willing to do her best—and—and she is grateful—for a little consideration——”

It was scarcely an appeal. He was describing Yolande as he had known her. He was thinking of all those bygone years.

But at this moment they were startled by the report of a gun; and that was followed by another and another.

“What the mischief is that?” called out Colonel Graham, as he hurried forward to the bow; for, indeed, the air was full of ominous

rumours just at that time ; and even a general massacre of the Europeans in Egypt had been talked of as a possibility.

It appeared, however, that this crowd of people who now emerged from a belt of palms, and came down to the river's edge to some boats there, was only a wedding party ; and Ahmed, who had been ashore with the *chef*, explained that these were the friends of the bride, escorting her thus far ; while the husband to be (the wedding ceremony was to take place in the evening) had sent camels to meet her, which were waiting for her on the other side of the Nile. And of course Mrs. Graham and Yolande were instantly called for, and came up in time to see the little veiled woman, with much conscious dignity, take her place in one of the boats, while her friends proceeded to put into the other boats the bales of carpets and the eight or ten donkeys which formed her marriage portion. Then, away on the other side, they saw two camels make their appearance, the first of them with a big tent on its back, surmounted by three tall hearse-like plumes ; and Ahmed, with much queer English, managed to explain that these plumes

were the projecting tops of the three palms of which the tent was composed ; and that the tent was sent by the bridegroom to receive his bride, while the other camel was to carry her household plenishing.

"It is obvious he hasn't sent a camel to fetch his mother-in-law," said Colonel Graham ; but the solemn-faced Ahmed did not understand what was meant, and took refuge in a surreptitious cigarette.

Then they saw the boats being slowly rowed across the great stream ; and the donkeys and bales were landed ; and the bride disappeared into the tent ; and presently the procession was on its way again, until the gathering dusk and the inequalities of the desert hid bride and friends and all from view.

"It is a wide river," said Mr. Winterbourne, absently, looking at the flowing waters, "to lie between the old home and the new, between the old life and the new. But it is the way of the world. She may be quite as happy as a wife as she was as a girl."

"I don't see why she shouldn't be a great deal happier," Mrs. Graham said, cheerfully.

"I am. I mean, I should be, if Jim weren't so impatient with Baby. Come away, Yolande dear; I have found a piece of blue ribbon, and I am going to make a snood for your hair."

At dinner it was very clear to Mrs. Graham that her brother had so far met with no hindrance to his suit; for he was unusually vivacious, and most obviously attentive and respectful to Yolande. He was delighted with Egypt, and with this placid and idle life, and with the general resolve to abstain from sightseeing ("there are plenty of British Museums everywhere, when you want to be bored," he said somewhat incorrectly); but he was chiefly busy with anticipations of the Highlands, and of the circumstances under which this same little party would reassemble there. He volunteered to go over from Lynn to Allt-nam-ba whenever Mr. Winterbourne wanted a rifle for one of the passes; nay, he said he knew the woods well, and would be glad to serve as an extra beater at any time. And when Mr. Winterbourne and Miss Yolande went to Inverstroy, he meant to beg his brother-in-law for an invitation. Of

course they would be going up the hill—that is, Mr. Winterbourne and Colonel Graham—and they would want all the keepers and gillies they could get; and what, in that case, was to become of Miss Yolande's salmon-fishing if he were not there to help? And Yolande regarded him with pleased and grateful eyes. It was so clear that he wished to be kind to her.

After dinner they found that the Arab sailors were having a little concert among themselves, and they stood for a while to listen. The grave-faced performers, with their flowing robes and heavily-turbaned heads, looking picturesque enough in the light of the swinging lamp, were squatted in a circle in the forward part of the dahabeeah, one of them possessed of a tambourine, another strumming on two small tom-toms; and to the time thus beat each singer would contribute a piece of shrill, high, melancholy recitative, while the others accompanied him with a heavy monotonous bass chorus. The Master of Lynn touched his sister on the arm; and she drew back from the little group without her absence being noticed. The two

of them passed through the saloon, along the corridor between the cabins, and out into what they called the Belvedere. Here there was nothing visible but the shining starlit heavens and the great broad dusky streams.

"Well?" she said.

"So far it is all right," he said, in a low voice, but with considerable excitement. "Oh, you can't imagine how sensible and reasonable he is about it—and so friendly, too. He told me exactly how he was situated. He would like to see her married and comfortably settled; and he just as good as intimated that he hoped she would say yes, although, of course, he said he would have everything left to her own wishes. There is another reason, too—which I cannot tell you about; but I can see plainly that his mind would be much more at ease if this thing were to come off. I am sure of it. Of course, he spoke in rather a sad way; any one can understand that; but every one has to consider what will be best in the end. And now, don't you see, Polly—now that I have got on so far, I am beginning to feel a bit shaky. If it had been stopped at the

beginning, well and good ; but now I don't want to spoil my chance by making a mistake. And my nerves are not what they ought to be—hanged if they are ; one gets no exercise in this dawdling kind of life ; and you don't feel fit —”

“I know what you're driving at, Archie,” said his sister, with a little laugh. “ You want encouragement. Poor thing ! Are you so very nervous ? Is she so terrible ? ”

“ Oh, but you don't understand,” said he. “ You don't see what a chance I have got. Of course, a woman does not covet a prize like that ; and you don't understand why I should feel nervous. But—but, you know, if she were suddenly startled, she might say no, plump and decisive. There would be an end. Whereas, if the idea were suggested to her by some one else —”

“ That's me,” said his sister, plainly. “ You want me to speak to her. But don't you think, my dear Master, that the idea has already occurred to her, and been suggested by yourself ? I should have thought your attentions were obvious enough.”

“ You ought to know, Polly,” said he.

"Well, they were obvious enough to me."

"But she is strange," said he, doubtfully. "She seems to think it natural that people should be friendly with her; and with people she knows she has very little reserve. But I have watched her. I have watched her manner with Graham; she is quite as friendly with him as she is with me. Of the two, I would say she was more friendly with him; she talks to him as if she had known him all her life."

"My dear Master, that is her cunning," said his sister, coolly. "They're all like that. They pretend to prefer married men; but they are watching the unmarried ones all the same. Wait till you speak."

He was silent for a second or two; and, fortunately, the Arabic improvisation going on forward seemed interminable. He passed the fingers of one hand over the open palm of the other; and regarded them pensively.

"If the biggest stag in Glendyerg was within eighty yards of me just now, I'd back its life against my rifle. I don't know what to do, Polly."

"There is only the one thing to do," said his practical sister.

"I am afraid of that plump and final no. I can't face it. Why——"

"And you want me to go and make her a proposal of marriage on your account? I wonder what she would think of you!" said pretty Mrs. Graham, scornfully.

"I don't want anything of the kind," said he. "You don't understand. Where are your brains, Polly?—they're generally sharp enough. I want you to make her familiar with the idea. I don't want to have her startled and frightened. Don't you see, there are a whole lot of things that a third person could talk about. You could tell her, for example, that travelling by ourselves like this shows you what people are. You see what they are, and know them. It isn't the chance acquaintanceship of ball-rooms and drawing-rooms. And she doesn't look on us as acquaintances at all; we are all old friends now—and rightly, too. There are whole heaps of things, like that, don't you see, Polly, that you might say to her, so that she wouldn't be frightened and startled——"

“And what am I to have for my share in this conspiracy?”

“Why, the prettiest sister-in-law you could wish for!” he said. “Oh, I know you. You can say sharp things; but I can see you are very fond of her; and I know you would be very proud of her if you were to take her to the Northern Meeting at Inverness. What’s more—I’d back you two, for good looks, against any two women at the Ball; and they get up a finer show there than anywhere else I know. She would just suit you, Polly—dark and fair together, of course; and I know she thinks you dress awfully well; and she would take your advice.”

This final touch proved effectual; even the shrewd young married woman succumbed.

“Well, I will try to find out what she thinks about it,” she said. “Of course, it is on the distinct understanding that her father approves?”

“Oh, most decidedly. He told me so in the plainest terms.”

“For that is the short and the long of the whole matter. Very well, I will speak to her.

I will do my best for you, Archie, you may depend. For sooner or later you would be making a fool of yourself with some one ; and this girl is really very nice and ladylike ; and I don't think you are likely to do better, in other respects. I suppose they have gone up above for coffee ; shall we go ?”

That same night Mrs. Graham announced the news to her husband in the privacy of their cabin.

“I think it is all plain sailing now with Archie,” she said. “He has spoken to Mr. Winterbourne about Yolande, and Mr. Winterbourne has given his consent.”

“The deuce he has !”

“Why shouldn't he ?” she retorted, with some sharpness.

“Oh, I daresay it's all right,” rejoined the lazy soldier, as he began to arrange the occult mechanism of his Levinge. “Rather a brief acquaintance, aint it ?”

“Why, certainly not. Archie was talking about that very thing. This constant companionship is worth years of acquaintanceship, and I don't see why they should not thoroughly understand and appreciate each other

by now. Archie does, any way. And each has just what the other wants ; she has money, and he will succeed to the title. I think it will be a very good match."

"Oh, I think so too," her husband said, good-naturedly. "She seems fond of him. And if he treated her with a little less courtesy, I daresay she would treat him with a little more frankness ; she is a humorous young party at times. But that will all come right. I don't quite see why it shouldn't be quite plain sailing, as you say. His Lordship will kick up dust and thunder about Winterbourne's politics ; but the buying back of Corrievreak will bring him round. Good-night."

Suddenly she uttered a shrill scream.

"Oh, Jim—a cockroach!—"

"Very well ; it isn't a kangaroo, is it ?" said he, sulkily. "Besides my revolver isn't loaded."

"Such a beast!—such a monster!—"

"Why don't you get into your hammock, then, instead of sitting there ?"

"I'm going directly," she said ; for indeed her dread of these huge insects was such

that they had had to rig up a hammock for her in her cabin. "But, Jim, I want to ask you about something that has been puzzling me a good deal. Didn't you say that the Winterbournes were a comparatively old family, up in the north of England there?"

"I believe so—I've heard so," her husband said, sleepily.

"Then why should Mr. Winterbourne want me to buy jewellery for Yolande?"

"Because she hasn't got any; or hasn't got enough, I suppose. Don't see it's any of my business."

"But where is the family jewellery?"

"How can I tell? He may be a younger son—rather think he is. What does it matter to you? You'll like the spending of the money well enough."

"But how should the girl come to have no jewellery at all? Where is her mother's? and her mother's mother's?"

"Oh, how can I tell! All I know is, she'll soon have plenty if Winterbourne allows you to go careering up and down Bond Street."

"Well, it is strange, you know," said

pretty Mrs. Graham, as she placidly examined the fastenings of her hammock. "I don't understand it; but it is one of those things that one can't well ask about. I never knew a girl, at her age, in her position in life, who hadn't plenty of jewellery—family rings and things of that sort. What an odd thing it would be if an engagement-ring were to be the first; and in that case I do hope Archie will buy a nice one when he is about it! But it is very strange, you know, Jim."

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVENTION.

MRS. GRAHAM saw clearly before her the difficulties and danger of the task she had undertaken ; and she approached it with much circumspection and caution. Time and an abundance of opportunities were on her side, however. Moreover, she and Yolande were like sisters now ; and when the men-folk were smoking together in some other part of the dahabeeah, and talking about public affairs or their chances of having a little shooting in the neighbourhood of Mer-hadj, these two were most likely seated in the cool shade of the Belvedere, having a quiet and confidential chat all to themselves, the while the slow-moving panorama of the Nile stole stealthily by.

And gradually Mrs. Graham got Yolande to think a good deal about the future, which, ordinarily, the girl was loth to do. She had

an admirable capacity for enjoying the present moment, so long as the weather was fine, and her father not a long way off. She had never experienced any trouble; and why should she look forward to any? She was in perfect health, and consequently her brain was free from morbid apprehensions. Sometimes, when Mrs. Graham was talking with the sadness begotten of worldly wisdom, the younger woman would laugh lightly and ask what there was on earth to depress her—except, perhaps, the absence of dear Baby. In short, Yolande could not be made anxious about herself. She was content to take the present as it was, and the future as it might come. She was far more interested in watching the operations of this or that African kingfisher, when the big black and gray bird, after fluttering in the air for a while in the manner of a hawk, would swoop down and dive into the river, emerging with a small silver fish in its beak.

But if she could not easily be made anxious about herself, she very easily indeed could be made anxious about her father; and Mrs. Graham quickly discovered that any-

thing suggested about him was instantly sufficient to arouse her interest and concern. She played upon that pipe skilfully, and yet with not the faintest notion that her siren music was anything but of the simplest and honestest kind. Was it not for the welfare and happiness of every one concerned? Even Jim, with his faculty for looking at the sardonic side of things, had not a word to say against it. It would be a very good arrangement, that oracle had declared.

"Do you know, dear," said she one morning to Yolande, "what Jim has just been saying?—that he would not be surprised if, sooner or later, your father were offered some place in the Government."

Yolande opened her eyes wide with surprise. But then she laughed, and shook her head.

"Oh no. It is impossible. He is not good friends with the Government. He has too many opinions to himself."

"I don't know," said pretty Mrs. Graham, looking at one of the little French mirrors, and smoothing her curls. "I don't know. You should hear Jim, any way. Of course, I

don't mean a post with a seat in the Cabinet ; but office of some kind—an Under-Secretaryship or something of that sort. Jim says he heard just before he left town that the Government were going to try to conciliate the Radicals, and that some member below the gangway would most likely be taken in. It would please some of the northern towns ; and Slagpool is an important place."

" Oh, do you think it is possible ? " cried the girl, with a new light in her eyes. " My papa in the Ministry — and always in town ? — "

" That's just it, Yolande dear," said Mrs. Graham. " If your papa were a member of the Government, in whatever place, he could not go gallivanting about like this——"

" Oh, of course not, certainly not," the girl said, eagerly. " He would live in London. He would have a house—a proper home. Do you think it is likely ? I never heard of it before. But why should it not be—why should it not be, dear Mrs. Graham ? There are very few members in the House of Commons—why, scarcely any at all—who are returned by such a number of persons.

Look at the majority he always has : does it not say that those people respect him, and believe he is working for the good of the country? Very well; why should it not be?"

"I quite agree with you ; and Jim says it is not at all unlikely. But you were talking about a house, Yolande dear : well, it would scarcely be worth your papa's while to take a house merely for you ; though it is certainly of importance for a member of the Government to have a town house, and entertain, and so forth. You could scarcely manage that, you know, my dear ; you are rather young ; but if your papa were to marry again ?"

"Yes ?" said Yolande, without betraying any dismay.

"In that case I have been wondering what would become of you," said the other, with her eyes cast down.

"Oh, that is all right," said the girl, cheerfully. "That is quite right. Madame has directed me to that once or twice—often ; but not always with good sense, I consider. For it cannot always happen that step-mother and step-daughter do not get on well—if there is one who is very anxious to please. And if

my papa were to marry again, it is not that I should have less of his society ; I should have more ; if there was a home, and I allowed to remain, I should have more ; and why should I have anything but kindness for his wife, who gives me a home ? Oh, I assure you, it is not I who would make any quarrel."

"Oh no ; I daresay not,—I daresay not, Yolande dear," said the other, with a gracious smile. "You are not terribly quarrelsome. But it seldom answers. You would find yourself in the way. Sooner or later, you would find yourself in the way."

"Then I would go."

"Where ?"

The girl made a little gesture by turning out the palms of her hands ever so slightly.

"I will tell you, my dear child, of one place where you could go. If you came to us at Inverstroy—now, or then, or at any time —there is a home there waiting for you ; and Jim and I would just make a sister of you."

She spoke with feeling, and, indeed, with honesty ; for she was quite ready to have welcomed Yolande to their northern home, wholly apart from the projects of the Master

of Lynn. And Yolande for a second put her hand on her friend's hand.

"I know that," said she, "and it is very kind of you to think of it; and I believe it true—so much that, if there was any need, I would accept it at once. And it is a very nice thing to think of—that there are friends who would take you into their own home, if there were need. Oh, I assure you, it is pleasant to think of, even when there is no need at all."

"Will you come and try it? Will you come and see how you like it," said pretty Mrs. Graham, with a courageous cheerfulness. "Why not? Your papa wants to be back in time for the Budget, or even before that. They say that it will be a late Session—that if they get away for the Twelfth they will be lucky. Now, you know, dear Yolande, between ourselves, your father's constituents are very forbearing. It is all very well for us to make a joke of it here; but really—really—really——"

"I understand you very well," said Yolande, quickly; "and you think he should remain in London till the Twelfth, and always

be at the House? Yes, yes; that is what I think too. Do you imagine it is I who take him away on voyage after voyage? No! For me, I would rather have him always at the House. I would rather read his speeches in the newspaper than see any more cities, and cities, and cities."

"Very well; but what are you going to do, Yolande, dear, between the time of our getting back and the Twelfth?"

"Oh," said Yolande, with her face brightening, "that will be a busy time—no more of going away—and I shall be all the time in the hotel in Albemarle Street—and papa and I dining together every night, and having a chat before he goes to the House."

"I am sure you are mistaken there," said Mrs. Graham, promptly. "Your father won't let you stay all that time in town. He hates the very name of town. He is too fond of you, too careful of you, Yolande dear, and too proud of the roses in your cheeks, to let you shut yourself up in a town hotel."

"But look at me!" the girl said, indignantly. "Do I look unwell? Am I sick looking? Why should not I live in a town

hotel as well as others? Are all unwell who live in London? No; it is folly to say that. And if anything were likely to make me unwell, it is not living in London; but it is the fretting, when I am away from London, that I can be of no use to my papa, and that he is living alone there. Think of his living alone in the hotel, and dining alone there—worse than that still, dining at the House of Commons. Why, it was only last night Colonel Graham and he were speaking of the bad dinners there—the heat and the crush and the badly-cooked joints—yes, and I sitting there, and saying to myself, ‘Very well, and what is the use of having a daughter if she cannot get for you a pretty dinner, with flowers on the table?’”

“I understand you so well; when you speak, it is like myself thinking,” said Mrs. Graham, in her kindly way (and not at all imagining that she was anything of a hypocrite, or talking for a purpose); “but you may put it out of your head. Your father won’t let you stay in town. I know that.”

“Then I suppose it will be Oatlands Park,” said Yolande, with a bit of a sigh.

"No. Why should it?" said her friend, briskly. "Come to Inverstroy. Go back with us. Then we will see about the cook and the housemaid in Inverness; and Archie will get the dog-cart and horses for you; and we might even go down to Allt-nam-ba, and see that the keeper has kept on fires during the winter, and that the lodge is all right. And then we will all go on to Inverstroy—Archie as well; and he will take you out salmon-fishing, for I shall have my own house to attend to for a while; but we will make you just one of the family, and you will amuse yourself just as you think best; and if we don't pet you, and make you comfortable, and as happy as ever you were in your life, then my name isn't Mary Graham. You will just see what a Highland welcome we will give you!"

"I know—I know," said the girl. "How can I thank you for such kindness? But then to think of my papa being all that time left by himself in London——"

"My dear Yolande, I must speak frankly to you, even if you fancy it cruel. Don't you imagine your father would stand a little better

with his constituents, and consequently be more at ease in his own mind, if he were left by himself a little more than at present? Don't you think it might be prudent? Don't you think it would be better for every one if he were left a little freer?"

"Yes, yes—it is so—I can see it——"

"And if you were with us, he could give his whole time and attention to Parliament."

"Yes, yes—though I had other wishes as well," the girl said, with her lips becoming a little tremulous.

"It is a very awkward situation," said Mrs. Graham, with abundant cheerfulness; "but I see the natural way out of it. Perhaps you don't, dear Yolande; but I do. I know what will happen. You will have a house and home of your own; and your father will be very glad to see you happy and settled; and he will give proper attention to Parliament while Parliament is sitting; but when Parliament is not sitting then he will come to you for relaxation and amusement, and you must have a salmon-rod ready for him in the spring, and in the autumn nice luncheons to be sent up the hill, where he

will be with the others. Now isn't that something to look forward to?"

"Yes—but—a house of my own?" the girl said, bewildered.

"Of course, when you marry, my dear. That is the obvious solution of the whole difficulty: it will put every one in a proper position."

She said neither yea nor nay; there was no affectation of maiden coyness—no protest of any kind. But her eyes were distant and thoughtful; not sad exactly, but seemingly filled with memories—probably memories of her own futile schemes and hopes.

That afternoon they came in sight of some walls and a minaret or two, half hidden by groves of palms lying along the high banks of the river; and these they were told belonged to Merhadj; but the Reis had had orders to moor the dahabeeah by the shore at some short distance from the town, so that the English party should not be quartered among the confusion and squalor farther along. The consequence of this was that very soon they found themselves the practical owners of a portion of Africa which

seemed to be uninhabited ; for when the whole party got ashore (with much excitement and eager interest), and waded across the thick sand, and then entered a far-stretching wood of acacia-trees, they could find no trace of human occupation ; the only living things being an abundance of hoopoes—the beautiful red-headed and crested birds were so tame that one could have flung one's cap at them—and wood-pigeons, the latter of a brilliant blue and gray and white. But by and by, as they wandered along—highly pleased to be on shore again, and grateful for the shelter of the trees—they met a slow procession of Arabs, with donkeys and camels, wending their way through the dry rushes and hot sand ; and as the animals were heavily laden, they made no doubt that the natives were carrying in farm produce to sell at Merhadj. Then, when they returned to the dahabeeah, they found a note from Ismat Effendi, written in excellent English, saying that his father had just returned from the interior, and that they both would do themselves the honour of paying a visit the following morning.

But what to do till dinner-time—now that the dahabeeah was no longer moving past the familiar features of the Nile? Ahmed came to the rescue. The *chef* was anxious to have some pigeons: would the gentlemen go ashore and shoot some for him? The gentlemen flatly refused to go and kill those half-tame creatures; but they discovered that Ahmed could shoot a little; so they lent him a gun, and offered to beat the wood for him. It was an occupation, at least. And so the two women were left by themselves again, with nothing before them but the choosing of a costume for dinner, and the donning of the same.

It was an opportunity not to be missed, and yet Mrs. Graham was terribly nervous. She had an uncomfortable suspicion all day that she had not been quite ingenuous in her conversation of the morning; and she was anxious to confess, and clear her mind, and yet afraid of the effects of her confession. But Yolande had spoken so reasonably and sensibly; she seemed to recognise the situation; why should she be startled?

For good or ill, she determined to plunge

in medias res; and she adopted a gay air, though her fingers were rather shaky. She put her arm within Yolande's arm. They were slowly walking up and down the upper deck, under the awning. They could just see the gentlemen of the party, along with Ahmed, disappearing into the grove of dark green acacias.

"Yolande, I am a wicked woman," she said, suddenly. "Hear my confession. I was not quite frank with you this morning; and I can't rest till I have told you. The fact is, my dear child, when I spoke to you about the possibility of your marrying, I knew of the wishes of one or two others; and I ought to have told you. And now I wish to confess everything; and you will forgive me if I say anything to offend or alarm you——"

"About my marrying?" said the girl, looking rather frightened. "Oh no; I do not wish to know. I do not wish to know of anything that any one has said to you."

"Then you have guessed?"

The mere question was an intimation. The girl's face flushed, and she said, with an eager haste, and in obvious trouble—

"Why should we speak of any such thing? Dear Mrs. Graham, why should I be afraid of the future? No; I am not afraid."

"But there are others to be considered—one, at least, whose hopes have been clear enough to the rest of us for some time back. Dearest Yolande, am I speaking too much now?"

She stood still, and took both the girl's hands in hers.

"Am I telling you too much? Or am I telling you what you have guessed already? I hope I haven't spoken too soon!—if I have done anything indiscreet, don't blame *him*! I could not talk to you just like sister to sister, and have this knowledge in the background, and be hiding it like a secret from you."

Yolande drew her hands away; she seemed scarcely able to find utterance.

"Oh no, Mrs. Graham—it is a mistake—it is all a mistake—you don't mean what you say—"

"But indeed I do!" the other said, eagerly. "Dearest Yolande, how can I help

wishing to have you for a sister? But if I have revealed the secret too soon, why you must forget it altogether, and let Archie speak for himself. But you know I do wish it. I can't help telling you. I have been thinking of what we might be to each other up there in the Highlands; for I never had a sister, and my mother died when I was quite young, like yours, dear Yolande. You can't tell how pleased I was when Archie began to—to show you attention; and I made sure you must have seen how anxious he was to please you——”

She paused for a second here; but there was no answer; the girl was too bewildered.

“Why, Jim would be like a big brother to you—you can't tell how fond he is of you; and your father approving, too——”

The girl started, as if she had been struck, and her face became quite white.

“Did you say—that my father wished it?” she said, slowly.

“Oh yes—oh yes!” Mrs. Graham said. “What more natural? What should he wish for more than to see you happily married? I wouldn't say that he would be more free to

attend to public affairs—I wouldn't say that was his reason, though it might be one of several reasons; but I can very well understand his being pleased at the notion of seeing you married and comfortably settled among people who would make much of you—as I really and truly think we should. Now, dear Yolande, don't say anything in haste. I am not asking you on behalf of Archie—I am telling you a secret to clear my own mind. Ah, and if you only knew how glad we should be to have you among us!"

The girl's eyes had slowly filled with tears; but she would not own it. She had courage. She looked her companion fair in the face, as if to say, "Do you think I am crying. I am not." But when she smiled, it was a very strange sort of smile—and very near crying.

"Then if it is a secret, let it remain a secret, dear Mrs. Graham," said she, with a sort of cheerfulness. "Perhaps it will always remain one, and no harm done. I did not know that my papa wished that; I did not suspect it. No; how could I? When we have talked of the years to come, that was not the arrangement that seemed best."

She paused for a while.

"Now I remember what you were saying in the morning. And you knew then, also, that my papa wished it?"

"Oh yes, certainly—not that he has spoken directly to me——"

But Yolande was scarcely listening. Rapid pictures were passing before her—pictures that had been suggested by Mrs. Graham herself. And Yolande's father, not her future husband, was the central figure of them.

Then she seemed to throw aside these speculations with an effort of will.

"Come," she said, more cheerfully, "is it not time to dress? We will put away that secret—it is just as if you had never spoken—it is all away in the air—vanished. And you must not tell your brother that you have been talking to me; for you know, dear Mrs. Graham, he has been very kind to me, and I would not give him pain—oh, not for anything——"

"My dear Yolande, if he thought there was a chance of your saying yes, he would be out of his senses with joy!" exclaimed the other.

"Oh, but that is not to be thought of," said the girl, with quite a practical air. "It is not to be thought of at all as yet. My papa has not said anything to me. And a little talking between us two—what is that? Nothing—air—it goes away; why should we remember it?"

Mrs. Graham could not understand this attitude at all. Yolande had said neither yes nor no; she seemed neither elated nor depressed; and she certainly had not—as most young ladies are supposed to do, when they have decided upon a refusal—expressed any compassion for the unfortunate suitor. Moreover, at dinner, Mrs. Graham observed that more than once Yolande regarded the young Master of Lynn with a very attentive scrutiny. It was not a conscious, furtive scrutiny; it was calm and unabashed. And Mrs. Graham also noticed that when her brother looked up to address Yolande, and met her eyes, those eyes were not hastily withdrawn in maiden confusion, but rather answered his look with a pleased friendliness. She was certainly studying him, the sister thought.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SETTLEMENT.

NEXT morning there was much hurrying to and fro on board the dahabeeah, in anticipation of the visit of the Governor; so that Mrs. Graham had no chance of having an extended talk with her brother. Nevertheless she managed to convey to him a few covert words of information and counsel.

"Archie," said she, "I have spoken to Yolande—I have hinted something to her."

"No!" he said, looking rather frightened.

"Oh, you need not be much alarmed," she said, with a significant smile. "Rather the other way. She seems quite to know how you have wished to be kind and attentive to her—quite sensible of it, in fact; and when I hinted something——"

"She did not say 'no' outright?" he interrupted, eagerly; and there was a flush of gladness on his face.

His sister glanced around.

"I thought there could be no harm if I told her that Jim and I would like to have her for a sister," she answered, demurely.

"And she did not say 'no' outright?" he repeated.

"Well," Mrs. Graham said, after a second, "I am not going to tell you anything more. It would not be fair. It is your business, not mine. I'm out of it now. I have intermeddled quite enough. But I don't think she hates you. And she seems rather pleased to think of living in the Highlands, with her father having plenty of amusement there, you know; and perhaps she might be brought to consider a permanent arrangement of that kind not so undesirable; and—and, well, you'd better see for yourself. As I say, Jim and I will be very glad to have her for a sister; and I can't say more, can I?"

She could not say more then, at all events; for at this moment Colonel Graham appeared on the upper deck with the intelligence that the Governor's barge was just then coming down the river. Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande were instantly summoned

from below ; some further disposition of chairs and divans was made ; some boxes of cigarettes were sent for ; and presently the sound of oars alongside announced the arrival of the chief notables of Merhadj.

The Master of Lynn saw and heard little of what followed ; he was far too busy with the glad and bewildering prospect that his sister's obscure hints had placed before him. And again and again he glanced at Yolande timidly, and yet with an increasing wonder. He began to ask himself whether it was really true that his sister had spoken to her. The girl betrayed no consciousness, no embarrassment ; she had greeted him on that morning just as on other mornings ; at this moment she was regarding the arrival of those grave officials with an interest which seemed quite oblivious of his presence. As for him, he looked on impatiently. He wished it was all over. He wished to have some private speech with her ; to have some inquiry of her eyes—surely her eyes would make some tell-tale confession ?—and in a vague kind of way he grew to think that the Governor's son, Ismat Effendi, who was

acting as interpreter, and who spoke English excellently, addressed a little too much of the conversation to the two ladies. Moreover, it was all very well for him, on coming on board, to shake hands with Mrs. Graham, for he had known her in India ; but why with Yolande ?

The Governor—a corpulent and sallow-faced old gentleman who looked like a huge frog—and his companions sat in solemn state ; while young Ismat, with much grace of manner and remarkably eloquent eyes, hoped that the visitors were comfortable on board the dahabeeah, and so forth. He was a well-dressed young gentleman ; his black frock-coat, white waistcoat, and red tarboosh, were all of the newest and smartest ; and his singularly small feet were encased in boots of brilliant polish. The Master of Lynn considered him a coxcomb, and also a Frenchified semi-theatrical coxcomb. But the women-folk liked his pleasant manners and his speaking eyes ; and when he said that he had never been to England, but intended to go the next year, Mrs. Graham made him definitely promise that he would pay them a visit at Inverstroy.

"And Miss Winterbourne," said the young gentleman with the swarthy face and the brilliant white teeth, "does she live in Scotland also?"

"Well, no," said Mrs. Graham, placidly; "but I hope you will find her there when you come. We want her to go back with us when we go back; and if she likes her first visit perhaps she will come again. I hope you will find her with us."

"And I also, madam, hope to have the felicity of the visit that you propose," said he, "if politics will permit me."

He directed an inquiring and rather curious glance at Colonel Graham.

"You did not hear anything very remarkable in Cairo, sir?"

"Well, nothing remarkable," said the stout soldier. "Lots of rumours. Always plenty of that in politics. Mostly lies. At the Consulate they thought we were safe enough."

The young man turned to his father, who was silently and solemnly sipping his coffee, apparently quite uninterested in what was going on, and spoke in Arabic to him for a

second or two. The old gentleman appeared to grunt assent.

" My father says he will have much delight in sending two or three soldiers to accompany your party if you are making excursions into the interior. There is no danger, except that some bad men will try to rob, when they can. Or if you will permit me, if you will have the grace to permit me, I will accompany you myself."

" But to take up so much of your time——" said pretty Mrs. Graham, with one of her most pleasant smiles.

He waved his hand in a deprecatory fashion.

" It will be too charming for me. Perhaps your dragoman does not know the district as well as I. Do you permit me? Shall I come to-morrow, with everything prepared?"

" Look here, Mr. Ismat," said Colonel Graham ; " you'd better come along and dine with us this evening ; then we can talk it over. In the meantime we can't keep your father and the other gentlemen waiting while we discuss our rambles. Will you please tell his Excellency once more how

much obliged we are, and honoured by his visit ; and that we will do ourselves the pleasure of coming to see him at Merhadj to-morrow, if that will suit his Excellency's convenience ?”

This was the final arrangement — that young Ismat Effendi was to come along to dinner in the evening ; a prospect which seemed to please him highly. Very soon after the grave company was seated in the stern of the barge, and the big oars were once more at work. The dahabeeah returned to its normal state of silence ; the little party of Europeans were again left to their own society ; and the Master of Lynn, a little anxious and excited, and almost fearing to meet Yolande’s eyes, and yet drawn towards her neighbourhood by a secret spell, declined to go ashore with the other two gentlemen, and remained with his sister and Yolande in the Belvedere, in the cool shade of the canvas awning.

No ; she betrayed not the slightest embarrassment at his sitting thus quite near her ; it was he who was nervous, and awkward in his speech. She was engaged

in some delicate needlework ; from time to time she spread it out on her lap to regard it ; and all the time she was chatting freely with Mrs. Graham about the recent visitors and their grave demeanour, their almost European costume, their wonderfully small feet, and so forth.

"Why do you not go ashore ?" she said, turning with frank eyes to the Master of Lynn. "It is so interesting to see the strange birds, the strange plants."

"It is cooler on the river," said he.

He was wondering whether his sister would get up and go away and leave them together ; and he was half afraid she would and half afraid she would not. But at all events he was now resolved that on the first opportunity he would speak to Yolande himself. He would not trust to any go-between. Was it not enough that she had had some intimation made to her of his wishes and hopes, and yet showed no signs of fear at his approach ?

The mid-day went by, and he found no chance of addressing her. His sister and she sat together, and sewed and chatted, or

stopped to watch some passing boat and listen to the boatmen singing a long and melancholy chorus to the clanking of the oars. At lunch-time Mr. Winterbourne and Colonel Graham turned up. Then in the afternoon the whole of them got into a boat, and were rowed away to a long and flat and sandy island on the other side of the Nile, which they explored in a leisurely way. And then back again to the dahabeeah for a draught of cold tea in the welcome shade of the awning.

It was not until near the end of the day that the long-looked-for opportunity arrived ; indeed, nearly every one had gone below to get ready for dinner ; but Yolande had lingered above to watch the coming over of the twilight. It was a strange enough sight in its way. For after the yellow colour had died out of the bank of bearded corn above the river's edge, and while the strip of acacia-trees over that again had grown solemn and dark against the clear, pallid, blue-gray sky of the south, far away in the north-western heavens there still lingered a glow of warmer light, and a few clouds high up had caught

a saffron tinge from the sinking sun. It seemed as if they here were shut in with the dark, while far away in the north,—over the Surrey lanes, and up among the Westmoreland waters, and out amid the distant Hebridean isles—the summer evening was still fair and shining. It led one to dream of home. The imagination took wings. It was pleasant to think of those beautiful and glowing scenes, here where the gloom of the silent desert was gathering all around.

She was standing by the rail of the deck ; and, when the others had gone, he quietly went over to her, and began talking to her—about the Highlands mostly, and of the long, clear twilights there, and how he hoped she would accept his sister's invitation to go back home with them when they returned to England. And when she said something very pretty about the kindness of all of them to her, he spoke a little more warmly, and asked if there was any wonder ? People got to know one another intimately through a constant companionship like this, and got to know and admire and love beautiful qualities of disposition and mind. And then he told

her it would not be honest if he did not confess to her that he was aware that his sister had spoken to her—it was best to be frank ; and he knew she was so kind she would not be angry if there had been any indiscretion ; and he begged for her forgiveness if she had been in any way offended. He spoke in a very frank and manly way ; and she let him speak, for she was quite incapable of saying anything ; her fingers were working nervously with a small pocket-book she held, and she had turned partly away, dreading to lift her eyes, and yet unable to go until she had answered him somehow. Then she managed to say, rather hurriedly and breathlessly—

“ Oh no, I am not offended. Why ? It is—a great honour—I—I knew it was your sister’s kindness and friendship that made her speak to me—please let me go away now——”

He had put his hand on her arm, unwittingly.

“ But may I hope, Yolande ? May I hope ? ” he said, and he stooped down to listen for the faintest word. “ I don’t want

you to pledge yourself altogether now. Give me time. May I try to win you? Do you think some time—some time of your own choosing—as far ahead as you may wish—you will consent? May I hope for it? May I look forward to it—some day?"

"Oh, but I cannot tell you—I cannot tell you now," she said, in the same breathless way. "I am sorry if I have given any pain—any anxiety—but—some other time I will try to talk to you—or my papa will tell you—but not now—you have always been so kind to me that I ask it from you——"

She stole away in the gathering darkness, her head bent down: she had not once turned her eyes to his. And he remained there for a time, scarcely knowing what he had said or what she had answered; but vaguely and happily conscious that she had not, at all events, refused him. Was it not much? He was harassed by all kinds of doubts, surmises, hesitations; but surely prevailing over these was a buoyant hope, a touch of triumph even? He would fain have gone away for a long stroll in the dusk, to have reasoned out his hopes and guesses with

himself; but here was dinner-time approaching, and young Ismat was coming; and he—that is, the Master of Lynn—began to have the consciousness that Yolande in a measure belonged to him, and that he must be there. He went down the steps with a light and a proud heart. Yolande was his, he almost felt assured. How should she regard him, when next they met?

And indeed at dinner there was no longer any of that happy serenity of manner on her part that had so puzzled him before. Her self-consciousness and embarrassment were so great as to be almost painful to witness; she never lifted her eyes; she ate and drank next to nothing; when she pretended to be listening to Ismat Effendi's descriptions of the troubles in the Soudan, any one who knew must have seen that she was a quite perfunctory listener, and probably understood but little of what was being said. But then no one knew that he had spoken but himself; and he strove to convince her that he was not regarding her by entering eagerly into this conversation about the false prophet; and though now and again her trouble and

confusion perplexed him—along with the recollection that she had been so anxious to say nothing definite—still, on the whole, triumph and rejoicing were in his heart. And how beautiful she looked, even with the pensive face cast down! No wonder young Ismat had admired her that morning: the very Englishness of her appearance must have struck him—the tall stature, the fine complexion, the ruddy-golden hair, and the clear, proud, calm, self-confident look of the maidenly eyes. This was a bride fit for a home-coming at Lynn Towers!

But, alas! Yolande's self-confidence seemed to have strangely forsaken her that evening. When they were all up on deck, taking their coffee in the red glow shed by the lanterns, she got hold of her father, and drew him aside into the darkness.

"What is it, Yolande?" said he, in surprise.

She took hold of his hand; both hers were trembling.

"I have something to tell you, papa—something serious."

Then he knew, and for a moment his

heart sank ; but he maintained a gay demeanour. Had he not reasoned the whole matter out with himself ? He had foreseen this crisis ; he had nerved himself by anticipation.

"Oh I know. I know already, Yolande," said he, very cheerfully. "Do you think I can't spy secrets ? And of course you come to me, with your hands trembling ; and you think you have something dreadful to confess ; whereas it is nothing but the most ordinary and commonplace thing in the world. You need not make any confession. Young Leslie has spoken to me—quite right ; very right ; I like frankness ; I consider him a very fine young fellow. Now what have you got to say—only I won't listen if you are going to make a fuss about it and destroy my nervous system, for I tell you it is the simplest and most ordinary affair in the world."

"Then you know everything—you approve of it, papa—it is your wish ?" she said, bravely.

"My wish !" he said ; "what has my wish to do with it, you stupid creature ?" But then he added, more gently : "Of course you know, Yolande, I should like to see you

married and settled. Yes, I should like to see that ; I should like to see you in a fixed home, and not liable to all the changes and chances of the life that you and I have been living. It would be a great relief to my mind. And then it is natural and right. It is not for a young girl to be a rolling-stone like that ; and, besides, it couldn't last : that idea about our always going on travelling wouldn't answer. So whenever you think of marrying ; whenever you think you will be happy in choosing a husband—just now, to-morrow, or any time—don't come to me with a breathless voice, and with trembling hands as if you had done some wrong, or as if I was going to object, for to see you happy would be happiness enough for me ; and as for our society together, well, you know, I could pay the people of Slagpool a little more attention, and have some more occupation that way ; and then you, instead of having an old and frail and feeble person like me to take care of you, you would have one whose years would make him a fitter companion for you, as is quite right and proper and natural. And now do you understand ?"

"Oh yes, I think so, papa," said she, quite brightly; and she regarded him with grateful and loving eyes. "And you would have ever so much more time for Parliament, would you not?"

"Assuredly."

"And you would come to see me sometimes, and go shooting and fishing, and take a real holiday—not in towns and hotels?"

"Oh, don't be afraid. I will bother the life out of you. And there are always fishings and shootings to be got somehow."

"And you would be quite happy, then?"

"If you were, I should be," said he; and really this prospect pleased him so much that his cheerfulness now was scarcely forced. "Always on this distinct and clear understanding," he added, "that, when we are coming back from the shooting, you will come out to meet us and walk back with us the last half mile."

"I should be dressing for dinner, papa," she said. "And just worrying my head off to think what would please you."

"You will be dressing to please your husband, you foolish creature, not me."

"He won't care as much as you, papa." Then she added, after a second : "I should get the London newspapers, yes? Quite easily? Do you know, papa, what Colonel Graham believes?—that they are going to take one of the extreme Liberals into the Ministry, to please the northern towns."

"But what has that got to do with you, child?" said he, with a laugh. "Very likely they may. But you didn't bring me over here to talk politics?"

"But even if you were in the Government, papa, you would have your holiday-time all the same," she said, thoughtfully.

"I a member of the Government?" said he. "You may as well expect to hear of me being sent to arrest the false prophet in the Soudan. Come away, then, Yolande; your secret is not a secret; so you need not trouble about it; and now that I have expounded my views on the situation, you may as well go and call to Ahmed that I want another cup of coffee."

And then he hesitated.

"You have not said yes or no yet, Yolande?"

"Oh no; how could I, until I knew what you might think?" said she, and she regarded him now with frank and unclouded eyes. "How could I? It might not have been agreeable to your wishes. But I was told that you would approve. At first—well, it is a sudden thing to give up visions you have formed; but when you see it is not practicable and reasonable, what is it but a small struggle? No; other plans present themselves—oh yes, I have much to think of now—that looks very pleasant to anticipate. Very much to look forward to—to hope for."

He patted her lightly on the shoulder.

"And if you make half as good a wife, Yolande, as you have been a daughter, you will do pretty well."

They went back to their friends, their absence scarcely having been noticed; for Ismat Effendi was a fluent and interesting talker. And whether Mr. Winterbourne had been playing a part or not in his interview with Yolande, that cheerfulness of his soon left him. He sat somewhat apart, and silent; his eyes were fixed on the deck; he was not listening. Yolande herself brought him the

coffee ; and she put her hand on his shoulder, and stood by him ; then he brightened up somewhat. But he was thoughtful and distraught for the whole of the evening, except when he happened to be spoken to by Yolande, and then he would summon up some of his customary humour, and petulantly complain about her un-English idioms.

And she ? Her anxiety and nervousness seemed to have vanished. It is true, she rather avoided the Master of Lynn, and rarely ventured to look in his direction ; but she was in good spirits, cheerful, practical, self-possessed ; and when Ismat Effendi, on going away, apologised to her for having talked tedious politics all the evening, she said, with a charming smile—

“ No ; not at all. How can politics be tedious ? Ah, but we will have our revenge, perhaps, in Scotland. Mrs. Graham says that in their house it is nothing but deer that is talked of all the evening : that will not interest you ? ”

“ I shall rejoice to be allowed to try,” said the polite young Egyptian ; and then he shook hands with her, and bowed very low, and left.

During the rest of the evening the Master of Lynn, seeing that Yolande seemed no longer in any trouble, kept near her, with some vague hope that she would herself speak, or that he might have some chance of reopening the subject that engrossed his mind. And indeed, when the chance arrived, and he timidly asked her if she had not a word of hope for him, she spoke very frankly, though with some little nervousness, no doubt. She made a little apology, in very pretty and stammering phrases, for not having been able to give him an answer; but since then, she said, she had spoken to her father, without whose approval she could not have decided.

"Then you consent, Yolande—you will be my wife!" he said, in a low and eager voice, upsetting in his haste all the continuity of those hesitating sentences.

"But is it wise?" said she, still with her eyes cast down. "Perhaps you will regret——"

He took her hand into his, and held it tight.

"This has been a lucky voyage for me,"

said he ; and that was all that he had a chance of saying just then ; but it was enough.

Colonel Graham heard the news that same evening. He was a man of solid and fixed ideas.

"A very good thing, too," said he to his wife. "A very good thing. Now they'll take the sheep off Allt-nam-ba, and make Corrievreak the sanctuary. Nothing could have happened better."

CHAPTER XV.

NEW PLANS.

EARLY next morning, and long before any one on board the dahabeeah was awake, Mr. Winterbourne was seated in the quiet little saloon writing the following letter :—

“ Near Merhadj, on the Nile, May 13.

“ Dear Shortlands—I have news for you. You will be glad to learn that Yolande is engaged to be married—I think with every prospect of happiness ; and you will also be glad to know that I heartily approve, and that so far from viewing the coming change with dread, I rather welcome it, and look on it as the final removal of one of the great anxieties of my life. Sometimes I wonder at myself, though. Yolande and I have been so much to each other. And I daresay I shall feel her absence for a while. But what does it matter ? My life has been broken

and wasted ; what remains of it is of little consequence, if her life be made the fuller and happier and more secured ; and I think there is every chance of that. After all, this definite separation will be better than a series of small separations, haunted by continual fears. She will be removed from all the possibilities you know of. As for me, what does it matter, as I say ? And so I have come to regard the handing over of my Yolande to somebody else as not such a hard matter after all ; nay, I am looking forward to it with a kind of satisfaction. When I can see her securely married and happily settled in a home, that will be enough for me ; and maybe I may have a chance from time to time of regarding the pride and pleasure of the young house-mistress.

“ The accepted suitor is Mrs. Graham’s brother (I think you know we came away with Colonel Graham, of Inverstroy, and his wife ?), and the only son of Lord Lynn. I have had a good opportunity of studying his character ; and you may imagine that, when I saw a prospect of this happening, I regarded him very closely and jealously. Well, I must

say that his qualities bore the scrutiny well. I think he is an honest and honourable young fellow; of fair abilities; very pleasant and courteous in manner (what I especially like in him is the consideration and respect he pays to women, which seems to be unusual nowadays; he doesn't stand and stare at them with a toothpick in his mouth); I hear he is one of the best deer-stalkers in the Highlands, and that speaks well for his hardihood and his temperance; he is not brilliant, but he is good-natured, which is of more importance in the long run; he is cheerful and high-spirited, which naturally follows from his excellent constitution: deer-stalking does not tend to congestion of the liver and bilious headache; he is good-looking, but not vain; and he is scrupulously exact in money matters. Indeed, he is almost too exact, if criticism were to be so minute, for it looks just a little bit odd, when we are playing cards for counters at threepence a dozen, to see the heir of the house of Lynn so very particular in claiming his due of twopence-halfpenny. But this little weakness is forgivable; to be prudent and economical is a very good failing

in a young man ; and then you must remember his training. The Leslies have been poor for several generations ; but they have steadily applied themselves to the retrieving of their condition and the bettering of the estate ; and it is only by the exercise of severe economy that they now stand in so good a position. So, doubtless, this young fellow has acquired the habit of being particular about trifles ; and I don't object ; from my point of view it is rather praiseworthy ; Yolande's fortune—and she shall have the bulk of what I have—will be placed in good and careful hands.

"So now all this is well and happily settled ; and, as every one bids fair to be content, you will ask what more we have to do than to look forward to the wedding, and the slippers, and the handfuls of rice. Well, it is the old story ; and you, as an old friend, will understand. That is why I write to you, after a wakeful enough night—for the sake of unburdening myself, even though I can't get a word of your sturdy counsel at this great distance. As I say, it is the old story. For the moment you delude yourself into the

belief that the time of peril and anxiety is past ; everything is safe now for the future ; with Yolande's life made secure and happy, what matters what happens elsewhere ? And the next moment new anxieties present themselves ; the old dread returns ; doubts whether you have acted for the best ; and fears about this future that seemed so bright. There is one point about these Leslies that I forgot to mention ; they are all of them apparently—and young Leslie especially—very proud of the family name and jealous of the family honour. I do not wonder at it. They have every right to be ; and it is rather a praiseworthy quality. But now you will understand, old friend, the perplexity I am in—afraid to make any revelation that might disturb the settlement which seems so fortunate a one, and yet afraid to transfer to the future all those risks and anxieties that have made the past so bitter and so terrible to me. I do not know what to do. Perhaps I should have stated the whole matter plainly to the young man when he came and asked permission to propose to Yolande ; but then I was thinking, not of that at all, but only of her

happiness. It seemed so easy and safe a way out of all that old trouble. And why should he have been burdened with a secret which he dared not reveal to her? I thought of Yolande being taken away to that Highland home—living content and happy all through her life; and it did not occur to me to imperil that prospect by any disclosure of what could concern neither her nor him. But now I have begun to torture myself in the old way again, and in spite of myself conjure up all sorts of ghastly anticipations. The fit does not last long; if you were here, with your firm way of looking at things, possibly I could drive away these imaginings altogether; but you will understand me when I say that I could wish to see Yolande married to-morrow and carried away to the Highlands. Then I could meet my own troubles well enough."

He was startled by the rustling of a dress—he looked up, and there was Yolande herself, regarding him with a bright and happy and smiling face, in which there was a trifle of surprise, and also perhaps a faint flush of self-consciousness, for it was but the previous

evening that she had told him of the engagement. But surely one glance of that face—so young, and cheerful, and confident—was enough to dispel those dark forebodings. The page of life lying open there was not the one on which to write down prognostications of trouble and sorrow. His eyes lit up with pleasure; the glooms of the night were suddenly forgotten.

"Writing? Already?" she said, as she went forward and kissed him.

"You are looking very well this morning, Yolande," he said, regarding her. "The silence of the boat does not keep you from sleeping, apparently, as it sometimes does with older folk. But where is your snood? —the colour suits your hair."

"Oh, I am not in the Highlands yet," she said lightly. "Do you know the song Mrs. Graham sings?—

'It's I would give my silken snood
To see the gallant Grahams come hame.'

That was in the days of their banishment."

"But what have you to do with the homecoming of the Grahams, Yolande?" her

father said, to tease her. "You will be a Leslie, not a Graham."

She changed the topic quickly.

"To whom are you writing?"

"To John Shortlands."

"May I see?"

She would have taken up the letter, had he not hastily interposed.

"No——"

"Ah, it is about business. Very well. But I may put in a postscript?"

"What do you want to write to Mr. Shortlands about?" her father said, in amazement.

"Perhaps it will be better for you to write, then. I was going to ask him to visit us at Allt-nam-ba."

"Well, now, Yolande, that is a most excellent idea!" he exclaimed. "You are really becoming quite a sensible and practical person. We shall want another gun. John Shortlands is just the man."

"We can give him," said she, sedately, "the bedroom over the dining-room; that will be farthest away from the noise of the kennels."

Then he stared at her.

"What on earth do you know about the bedroom over the dining-room, or the kennels either?"

"Mr. Leslie," said she, with a momentary flush, "gave me a plan of the house—there it is, papa. Oh, you shall have no trouble—it is all quite easily arranged—"

She took out a piece of paper from her note-book, unfolded it, and put it before him.

"There," said she, with a practical air, "is a very good room—that looks down the glen—that is for you. That one is for a visitor—yes, Mr. Shortlands, if he will come—so that he shall not be disturbed by the dogs. That one for me—"

"But why should you be disturbed by the dogs?"

"Me? Oh no! I shall be used to it. Besides," she said, with a laugh, "there is nothing that will disturb me—no, not the cockatoo at the Château that Madame did not keep more than three days."

"But look here, Yolande," said he, gravely. "I am afraid you are going to attempt too

much. Why should you? Why should you bother? I can pay to get somebody to do all that. It's all very well for Mrs. Graham, who has all her servants about her, trained to help her. And she has been at the thing for years. But really, Yolande, you are taking too great a responsibility; and why should you worry yourself when I can pay to get it done? I daresay there are people who will provision a house as you provision a yacht, and take back the surplus stores. I don't know; I suppose so. In any case, I can hire a housekeeper up there——”

She put her hand on his mouth.

“No—no—no,” she said, triumphantly. “Why, it is all arranged—long ago—all settled—every small point. Do I not know what cartridges to buy for you, for the rifle that Mr. Leslie is to lend you—do I not know even that small point?”

She referred to her note-book.

“There it is,” she said. “Eley-Boxer, 500 bore, for express rifle——”

“Well, you know, Yolande,” said he, to test her, “I should have thought that when the Master proposed to lend me a rifle, he might

have presented me with some cartridges, instead of letting me buy them for myself."

But she did not see the point.

"Perhaps he did not remember," said she, lightly. "Perhaps it is not customary. No matter; I shall have them. It is very obliging that you get the loan of the rifle. Quand on emprunte, on ne choisit pas."

"Very well, then; go away, and let me finish my letter," said he, good-naturedly.

When she had gone he turned the sheet of paper that he had placed face downwards, and continued :

"When I had written the above, Yolande came into the saloon. She has just gone, and everything is changed. It is impossible to look at her—so full of hope and life and cheerfulness—and be downcast about the future. It appears to me now that whatever trouble may befall will affect me only; and that that does not much matter; and that she will be living a happy life far away there, in the north, without a care. Is it not quite simple? She will no longer bear my name. Even if she were to come to London—though it is far from probable they will ever have a

London house, even for the season—she will come either as the Hon. Mrs. Leslie or as Lady Lynn; and nothing could occur to alarm her or annoy her husband. Everything appears to have happened for the best; and I don't see how any *contretemps* could arise. When we return to England, the proposal is that Yolande should go on with the Grahams to Inverstroy, until I go down to a shooting that I have rented for the season from Lord Lynn—Allt-nam-ba is the name of the place—and there we should be for the following three months. I don't know how long the engagement of the young people is likely to last; but I should say they knew each other pretty well after being constantly in each other's society all this time; and I, of course, could wish for nothing better than a speedy marriage. Nor will there be any risk about that. Whether it takes place in the Highlands, or at Weybridge, or anywhere else, there needs be no great ceremony or publicity; and I would gladly pay for a special license, which I could fairly do on the plea that it was merely a whim of my own.

"Now as for yourself, dear old boy. Would you be surprised to hear that Yolande has just suggested—entirely her own suggestion, mind—that you should come and pay us a visit at that shooting-box? She has even decided that you are to have the bed-room farthest removed from the noise of the kennels. I do hope you will be able to go down with me for the Twelfth. With decent shooting, and if the moor is in its normal state, they say we should get 1000 or 1200 brace; and besides that, the moor abuts on three deer forests, and there is no reason, moral or legal, why you shouldn't have a shot at such *feræ naturæ* as may stray on to your ground. And then (which is, perhaps, a more important thing—at all events, you would be interested, for I think you rather like the child) you would see what kind of a choice Yolande has made. I hope I am not blinded by my own wishes; but it seems as if everything promised well.

"There is another thing I want to mention to you before I close this screed—which more resembles the letters of our youth than the *staccato* notes they call letters nowadays. I have talked to you about this engagement as

if it were a good arrangement—a solution, in fact, of a very awkward problem ; but don't think for a moment that, when they do marry, it will be anything but a marriage of affection. Mr. Leslie is not so poor that he needs to marry for money—on the contrary, the family are fairly well off now, and the estates almost free ; and Yolande, on the other hand, is not the sort of creature to marry for title or social position. I saw that he was drawing towards her a long time ago—as far back, indeed, as the time of our arriving at Malta ; and as for her, she made a friend and companion of him almost at the beginning of the voyage in a way very unusual with her ; for I have noticed again and again, in travelling, how extremely reserved she was when any one seemed anxious to make her acquaintance. No doubt the fact that he was Mrs. Graham's brother had something to do with it ; for the Grahams were very kind to her at Oatlands—and have been ever since, I need hardly say. It will be very pleasant to her to have such agreeable neighbours when she marries. Mrs. Graham treats her like a sister already ; she will not be going among strange kins-

folk ; nor among those likely to judge her harshly.

"So far we have enjoyed the trip very well ; though, of course, to some of us its chief interest lay in this little drama that now points, I hope, to a happy conclusion. We have had the whole Nile to ourselves—all the tourists gone long ago. The heat considerable : yesterday at mid-day it was 108 degrees in the shade ; but it is a dry heat, and not debilitating. Of course we keep under shelter on the hottest days. I hear that the wine at dinner is of a temperature of 90 degrees—there being no ice ; so that we abstainers have rather the best of it, the water, kept in porous jars, being much cooler than that. We visit Merhadj to-day ; and thereafter begin a series of excursions in the neighbourhood—if all goes well. But we heard some ugly rumours in Cairo, and may at any moment have to beat a swift retreat.

"As soon as I get back I shall begin my Parliamentary attendance again, and stick close to work until the end of the Session ; and I have no doubt the Government will give me plenty of chances of reminding the

Slagpool people of my existence. I wish you would have a paragraph put in one of the London papers to the effect that the health of the member for Slagpool being now almost re-established by his visit to Egypt, he will in a few weeks be able to take his place again in the House. Then the Slagpool papers would copy. They have been very forbearing with me, those people; I suppose it is because I bully them. They would have turned out any more complaisant person long ago.

“ Yolande—still harping on his daughter, you will say ; but it is only for a little while ; soon I shall see and hear little enough of her —has undertaken the whole control and household management of the shooting-box ; and I daresay she will make a hash of it ; but I don’t think you will be severe on her, if, as I hope, you can come to us. It will be an occupation and amusement for her while she is in the Highlands ; and I am very glad she is going to be with the Grahams during that interval. She wearied a good deal at Oatlands Park, though she tried not to show it ; and as for ever having her in London

again—no, that is impossible. Mrs. Leslie or Lady Lynn may come and live in London when she pleases—though I hope it may be many a year before she does so—but not Yolande Winterbourne. Poor child, she little knows what kind of a shadow there is behind her fair and bright young life. I hope she will never know; I am beginning to believe now that she will never know; and this that has just happened ought to give one courage and strength.

“Do not attempt to answer this letter. The writing of it has been a relief to me. I may be back in town very shortly after you get it; for we shall only stay in Cairo a few days to get some things for Yolande that may be of service to her after.—Always your friend,

“G. R. WINTERBOURNE.

“*P.S.*—I should not wonder at all, if, before this letter gets posted even, that torment of fear and nervous apprehension should again get possession of me. I wish the marriage were well over, and I left alone in London.”

The various noises throughout the dahabéeh now told him that all the people were stirring ; he carefully folded this letter, and put it in his pocket (that he might read it over again at his leisure) ; and then he went out and up the stairs to the higher deck. Yolande was leaning with her elbows on the rail, gazing out on the wide waters and the far wastes of sand. She did not hear him approach ; she was carelessly singing to herself some snatch of a French song, and doubtless not thinking at all how inappropriate the words were :—

“ Ohé ! . . . c'est la terre de France !
Ohé ! . . . Garçons ! bonne espérance !
Vois-tu, là-bas, sous le ciel gris
A l'horizon ? . . . C'est le pays !
Madelon, Périne
Toinon, Catherine——”

“ Yolande,” said he, and she started and turned round quickly.

“ Why, you don't seem to consider that you have taken a very serious step in life,” he said, with a smile.

“ Moi ?”

Then she recalled herself to her proper tongue.

"I think it pleases every one; do you not?" she said, brightly; and there were no more forebodings possible when he found himself, as now, face to face with the shining cheerfulness of her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

OBEDIENCE.

YOLANDE was right on that one point at least ; every one seemed greatly pleased. There was a new and obvious satisfaction permeating all through this little party in exile. Mrs. Graham was more affectionate than ever—it was “dear Yolande” every other minute ; Colonel Graham was assiduous in giving her perfectly idiotic advice about her housekeeping at Allt-nam-ba ; and the Master of Lynn sought, but sought in vain, for opportunities of having little confidential talks with her. And the most light-hearted of them all was Yolande herself. Her decision once given, she seemed to trouble herself no more about the future. Every one was pleased ; so was she. She betrayed no concern ; she was not embarrassed by that increase of attention and kindness which, however slight, was easily recognisable and

significant. To all appearance she was occupied, not in the least with her future duties as a wife, but solely and delightedly with preparations for the approaching visit to Merhadj; and she was right thankful that they were going by water, for on two occasions they had found the sand of the river-bank to be of a temperature of 140 deg. in the sun, which was not very pleasant for women-folk wearing thin-soled boots.

When they had got into the stern of the big boat, and were being rowed up the wide yellow-green river, her father could not help regarding this gaiety of demeanour with an increasing wonder, and even with a touch of apprehensive doubt. And then again he argued with himself. Why should she anticipate the gravities of life? Why should she not be careless and light-hearted, and happy in the small excitements of the moment? Would it not be time to face the evil days, if there were to be any such, when they came? And why should they come at all? Surely some lives were destined for peace. Why should not the story of her life be like the scene now around them—placid, beautiful,

and calm, with unclouded skies? To some that was given; and Yolande (he gradually convinced himself) would be one of those. To look at her face—so full of life and pleasure and bright cheerfulness—was to acquire hope; it was not possible to associate misery or despair with those clear-shining confident eyes. Her life (he returned to the fancy) was to be like the scenery in which the courtship and engagement passage of it had chanced to occur—pretty, placid, unclouded, not too romantic. And so by the time they reached Merhadj he had grown to be, or had forced himself to appear, as cheerful as any of them. He knew he was nervous, fretful, and liable to gloomy anticipations; but he also had a certain power of fighting against these, and that he could do best when Yolande was actually beside him. And was she not there now—merry and laughing and delighted; eagerly interested in these new scenes, and trying to talk to every one at once? He began to share in her excitement; he forgot about those vague horoscopes; it was the crowd of boats, and the children swimming in the Nile, and the women coming down

with pitchers on their heads, and all the other busy and picturesque features along the shore, that he was looking at, because she also was looking at them; and it was no visionary Yolande of the future, but the very sensible and practical and light-hearted Yolande of that very moment, that he had to grip by the arm, with an angry remonstrance about her attempting to walk down the gangboard by herself. Yolande laughed; she never believed much in her father's anger.

They got ashore to find themselves in the midst of a frightful tumult and confusion—at least, so it appeared to them after the silence and seclusion of the dahabeeah. Donkeys were being driven down to the river, raising clouds of dust as they came trotting along; the banks swarmed with mules and camels and water-carriers; the women were filling their pitchers, the boys their pig-skin vessels; the children were driving and splashing and calling; and altogether the bustle and clamour seemed different enough from the ordinary repose of Eastern life, and were even a trifle bewildering. But in the midst of it all appeared

young Ismat Effendi, who came hurrying down the bank to offer a hundred eager apologies for his not having been in time to receive them ; and under his guidance they got away from the noise and squalor, and proceeded to cross a large open square, planted with a few acacia-trees, to the Governor's house just outside the town. The young Ismat was delighted to be the escort of those two English ladies. He talked very fast ; his eyes were eloquent ; and his smiling face showed how proud and pleased he was. And would they go through the town with him after they had done his father the honour of a visit ?

"The bazaars are not like Cairo," said he. "No ; no ; who could expect that ? We are a small town ; but we are more Egyptian than Cairo ; we are not half foreign, like Cairo."

"I am sure it will be all the more interesting on that account," said Mrs. Graham, graciously ; and Yolande was pleased to express the same opinion ; and young Ismat Effendi's face seemed to say that a great honour had been conferred on him and on Merhadj.

And indeed they were sufficiently interested in what they could already see of the place—this wide sandy square, with its acacias in tubs, its strings of donkeys and camels, its veiled women and dusky men; with the high bare walls of a mosque, the tapering minaret, some lower walls of houses, and everywhere a profusion of palms that bounded the farther side.

"Hillo, Mr. Ismat," called out Colonel Graham, as two gangs of villainous-looking convicts, all chained to each other, came along, under guard of a couple of soldiers. "What have these fellows been doing?"

"They are prisoners," said he, carelessly. "They have killed somebody, or stolen something. We make them carry water."

The next new feature was a company of soldiers in white tunics and trousers and red tarbooshes, who marched quickly along to the shrill sharp music of bugles. They disappeared into the archway of a large square building.

"That is my father's house," exclaimed young Ismat to the ladies. "He looks to your visit with great pleasure. And the other gentlemen of the town, they are there also;

and the chief engineer of the district. Your coming is a great honour to us."

"I wish I knew a little Arabic," said Mrs. Graham. "I am sure we have not thanked his Excellency half enough for his kindness in lending us his dahabeeah."

"Oh, quite enough, quite enough!" said the polite young Egyptian. "I assure you it is nothing. Though it is a pity my father does not understand English—and not much French, either. He has been very busy all his life, and not travelling. The other gentlemen speak French, like most of the official Egyptians."

"And you," said Mrs. Graham, regarding him with her pretty eyes,—"do you speak French as well as you speak English?"

"My English!" he said, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "It is very bad. I know, it is very, very bad—I have never been in England—I have had no practice except a little in India. But, on the contrary, I have lived three years in Paris; French is much more natural to me than English."

"It is so with me also, Mr. Ismat," said Yolande, a trifle shyly.

"With you!" he exclaimed.

"I have lived nearly all my life in France. But your English, that you speak of, is not in the least bad. It is very good; is it not, Mrs. Graham?"

Nothing further could be said on that point, however, for they were just escaping from the glare of the sun into a cool high archway; and from that they passed into a wide, open courtyard, where the guard of soldiers they had seen enter presented arms. Then they ascended some steps; and finally were ushered into a large and lofty and barely-furnished saloon, where the Governor and the notables of Merhadj received them with much serious courtesy. But this interview, as it turned out, was not quite so solemn as that on the deck of the dahabeeah; for, after what Ismat Effendi had said to the two ladies without, it was but natural that the conversation should be conducted in French; and so the coffee and cigarettes which were brought in by two young lads were partakne of in anything but silence. And then, as little groups were thus formed, and as Ismat's services as interpreter were not in such con-

stant demand, he somehow came to devote himself to the two ladies, and as Yolande naturally spoke French with much more ease and fluency than Mrs. Graham, to her he chiefly addressed himself. The Master of Lynn did not at all like this arrangement. He was silent, and impatient. He regarded this Frenchified Arab, who seemed to consider himself so fascinating, with a goodly measure of robust English contempt. And then he grew angry with his sister. She ought not to be, and she ought not to permit Yolande to be, so familiar with this Egyptian fellow. Did she not know that Egyptian ladies studiously kept their faces concealed ? And what must he be thinking of these two English ladies, who laughed and chatted in this free and easy fashion ?

Then, as regarded Yolande, his gratitude for the great gift she had given him was still full in his mind, and he was willing to make every excuse for her, and to treat her with a manly forbearance and leniency ; but at the same time he could not get rid of a certain consciousness that she did not seem to recognise as she ought that he had, in a way, a

right of possession. She bore herself to him just as she bore herself to the others ; if there was any one of the party whom she seemed specially to favour that morning as they came up the Nile, it was Colonel Graham, who did nothing but tease her. She did not seem to think there was any difference between yesterday and to-day ; whereas yesterday she was free, and to-day she was a promised bride. However, he threw most of the blame on his sister. Polly was always trying the effect of her eyes on somebody ; and this Egyptian was as good as another. And he wondered how Graham allowed it.

But matters grew worse when this ceremonious interview was over. For when they went to explore the narrow, twisting, mud-paved, and apparently endless bazaars of Merhadj, where there was scarcely room for the camels and donkeys to pass without bumping them against the walls or shop doors, of course they had to go two and two ; and as young Ismat had to lead the way, and as he naturally continued to talk to the person with whom he had been talking within, it fell out that Yolande and he were the first pair ;

the others following as they pleased. Once or twice the Master struggled forward through the crowd and the dust and the donkeys, and tried to detach Yolande from her companion ; but in each case some circumstance happened to intervene, and he failed ; and the consequence was that, bringing up the rear with Mr. Winterbourne, who was not a talkative person, he had abundant leisure to nurse his wrath in silence. And he felt he had a right to be angry, though it was not perhaps altogether her fault. She did not seem to understand that there were relations existing between engaged people different from those existing between others. He had acquired a certain right ; so, in fact, had she ; for he put it to himself whether, supposing he had had the chance of walking through those miserable little streets of Merhadj with the prettiest young Englishwoman who ever lived, he would have deserted Yolande for her side. No, he would not. And he thought that he ought to remonstrate, and that he would remonstrate ; but yet in a kindly way, so that no offence could be taken. It could be no offence, surely, to beg from her just a little bit more of her favour.

Meanwhile, this was the conversation of those two in front, as they slowly made their way along the tortuous, catacomb-looking thoroughfare, with its dusky little shops, in the darkness of each of which sat the merchant, cross-legged, and gazing impassively out from under his large white turban.

"What is it, then, you wish?" he was saying to her; and he spoke in French that was much more idiomatic, if not any more fluent, than his English. "Curiosities? Bric-à-brac?"

"It is something very Eastern, very Egyptian, that I could send to the ladies at the Château where I was brought up," she said, as she attentively scanned each gloomy recess. "And also I would like to buy something for Mrs. Graham—a little present—I know not what. Also for my papa. Is there nothing very strange—very curious?"

"But alas! Mademoiselle," said he, "we have here no manufactures. Our business of the neighbourhood is agriculture. All these articles in the bazaar are from Cairo; we have not even any of the Assiout pottery, which is pretty and curious, but perhaps not

safe to carry on a long journey. The silver jewellery is all from Cairo ; those silks from Cairo also ; those cottons from England——”

“At Cairo, then, one could purchase some things truly Egyptian ?”

“Certainly—certainly, Mademoiselle, you will find the bazaars at Cairo full of interest. Ah, I wish with all my heart I could accompany you !”

“That would be to encroach entirely too much on your goodness,” said she, with a pleasant smile.

“Not at all,” said he, earnestly. “Ah no ; not at all. It is so charming to find one’s self for a time in new society ; and if one can be of a little assistance, that is so much the better. Then there is also something I would speak to Monsieur your father about, Mademoiselle, before you return to the dahabeeah. I have arranged one or two excursions for you, which may interest you, perhaps ; and the necessary means are all prepared ; and I think it might be of advantage to begin these at once. There is no danger—no, no ; there is no cause for any alarm ; but always of late the political atmo-

sphere has been somewhat disturbed ; and if you were at Cairo, you would find out better what was going to happen than we ourselves do here. Then, as you have said, you would wish to buy some things ; and you will have need of plenty of time to go through the bazaars——”

He seemed to speak with a little caution at this point.

“ I have heard the gentlemen speak of it,” said she, with no great concern, for she was far from being a nervous person ; “ but they seemed to think there was no danger.”

“ Danger ? No, no,” said he. “ For you there can be no danger. But if there is political disquiet and disturbance, it might not be quite agreeable for you ; and that is all I wish to say to Monsieur your father, that he would have the goodness to make the excursions as soon as possible, and so leave more time for judging the situation. It is a hint—it is a suggestion—that is all.”

“ I am sure that my papa and Colonel Graham will do whatever you think best,” said she.

“ You are very good, Mademoiselle. I

wish to serve them," said he, with great courtesy.

Well, not only did this young man—whether intentionally or not, it was impossible to say—monopolise Yolande's society during the remainder of their exploration of Merhadj, but furthermore, on their embarking in their boat to return, he accepted an invitation to dine with them that same evening; and the Master of Lynn was determined that, before young Ismat put foot on board the dahabeeah, Yolande would be civilly but firmly requested to amend her ways. It was all very well for his sister, who was a born flirt, to go about making great friends with strangers; and it was all very well for Colonel Graham, who was too lazy to care about anything, to look on with good-humoured indifference. But already this audacious youth had begun to pose Yolande as an exalted being. She knew nothing about garrison life in India.

He had very considerable difficulty in obtaining a private conversation with Yolande, for life on board the dahabeeah was distinctly public and social; but late on in the afternoon he succeeded.

"So, Yolande," said he, with an artful carelessness, "this has been the first day of our engagement."

"Oh yes," said she, looking up in a pleasant way.

"We haven't seen much of each other," he suggested.

"Ah no; it has been such a busy day. How much nicer is the quiet here, is it not?"

"But you seemed to find Ismat Effendi sufficiently amusing," he said, somewhat coldly.

"Oh yes," she answered, quite frankly. "And so clever and intelligent. I hope we shall see him when he comes to England."

"I thought," said he, "that in France young ladies were brought up to be rather reserved—that they were not supposed to become so friendly with chance acquaintances."

Perhaps there was something in the tone that caused her to look up, this time rather seriously.

"I should not call him a chance acquaintance," she said, slowly. "He is the friend of Colonel Graham, and of papa, and of yourself." And then she added, speaking still

slowly, and still regarding him : “ Did you think I was not enough reserved ? ”

Well, there was a kind of obedience in her manner—a sort of biddableness in her eyes—that entirely took the wind out of the sails of his intended reproof.

“ You see, Yolande,” said he, in a much more friendly way, “ perhaps it was mere bad luck ; but after getting engaged only last night, you may imagine I wanted to see a little of you to-day ; and you can’t suppose that I quite liked that Egyptian fellow monopolising you the whole time. Of course, I am not jealous—and not jealous of that fellow!—for jealousy implies suspicion ; and I know you too well. But perhaps you don’t quite understand that people who are engaged have a little claim on each other, and expect to be treated with a little more intimacy and friendliness than as if they were outsiders.”

“ Oh yes, I understand,” she said, with her eyes cast down.

“ Of course, I am not complaining,” he continued, in the most amiable way. “ It would be a curious thing if I were to begin to complain now, after what you said last

night. But you can't wonder if I am anxious to have all your kindness to myself; and that I should like you and me to have different relations between ourselves from those we have with other people. An engagement means giving up something on both sides, I suppose. Do you think I should like to see you waltzing with any one else now? It isn't in human nature that I should like it."

"Then I will not waltz with any one," she said, still looking down.

"And I don't think you will find me a tyrannous sort of person, Yolande," said he, with a smile, "even if you were inclined to make an engagement a much more serious matter than you seem to consider it. It is more likely you who will prove the tyrant; for you have your own way with everybody; and why not with me too? And I hope you understand why I spoke, don't you? You don't think it unkind?"

"Oh no, I quite understand," she said, in the same low voice.

Ismat Effendi came to dinner, as he had promised. She spoke scarcely a word to him the whole evening.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CHAT IN THE DESERT.

“ARCHIE,” said his sister, on one occasion, in rather a significant tone, “you will have some trouble with papa.”

They were on their way to visit a convent some few miles inland, and the only thing that varied the monotony of the journey was the occasional stumbling of the wretched animals they rode. He glanced round, to see that the others were far enough off; then he said, either carelessly or with an affectation of carelessness—

“I daresay. Oh yes, I have no doubt of it. But there would have been a row in any case; so it does not matter much. If I had brought home the daughter of an archangel, he would have growled and grumbled. He gave you a pretty warm time of it, Polly, before he let you marry Graham.”

And then he said, with more vehemence—

"Hang it all, my father doesn't understand the condition of things nowadays! The peerage isn't sacred any longer; you can't expect people to keep on intermarrying and intermarrying, just to please Burke. We can show a pretty good list you know; and I wouldn't add any name to it that would disgrace it; but that craze of my father's is all nonsense. Why, the only place nowadays where a lord is worshipped and glorified is the United States; that's where I should have gone if I had wanted to marry for money; I daresay they would have found out that sooner or later I should succeed to a peerage. Of course, my father is treated with great respect when he goes to attend meetings at Inverness; and the keepers and gillies think he is the greatest man in the kingdom; but what would he be in London? Why, there you find governing England a commoner, whose family made their money in business; and under him—and glad enough to take office, too—noblemen whose names are as old as the history of England——"

His sister interrupted him.

"My dear Master," said she, "please remember that because a girl is pretty her father's politics are not necessarily right. If you have imbibed those frightful sentiments from Mr. Winterbourne, for goodness' sake say nothing about them at the Towers. The matter will be difficult enough without that. You see, with anybody else, it might be practicable to shelve politics; but Mr. Winterbourne's views and opinions are too widely known. And you will have quite enough difficulty in getting papa to receive Mr. Winterbourne with decent civility, without your talking any wild Radicalism in that way."

"Radicalism?" said he. "It is not Radicalism. It is common sense, which is just the reverse of Radicalism. However, what I have resolved on is this, Polly: his lordship shall remain in complete ignorance of the whole affair until Yolande goes to Allt-nam-ba. Then he will see her. That ought to do something to smooth the way? There is another thing, too. Winterbourne has taken Allt-nam-ba; and my father ought to be well disposed to him on that account alone."

"Because a gentleman rents a shooting from you for one year——"

"But why one year?" he interposed, quickly. "Why shouldn't Winterbourne take a lease of it? He can well afford it. And with Yolande living up there, of course he would like to come and see her sometimes; and Allt-nam-ba is just the place for a man to bring a bachelor friend or two with him from London. He can well afford it. It is his only amusement. It would be a good arrangement for me, too; for I could lend him a hand—and the moor wants hard shooting, else we shall be having the disease back again some fine day. Then we should continue to let the forest."

"And where are you and Yolande going to live then?" said his sister, regarding him with a curious look. "Are you going to install her as mistress of the Towers?"

"Take her to Lynn!" he said, with a scornful laugh. "Yes, I should think so! Cage her up with that old cat, indeed!"

"She is my aunt as well as yours, and I will not have her spoken of like that," said Mrs. Graham, sharply.

"She is my aunt," said this young man.

"And she is yours; and she is an old cat as well. Never mind, Polly. You will see such things at Lynn as your small head never dreamed of. The place has just been starved for want of money. You must see that when you think of Inverstroy: look how well everything is done there. And then, when you consider how we have been working to pay off scores run up by other people—that seems rather hard, doesn't it?—"

"I don't think so—I don't think so at all!" his sister said, promptly. "Our family may have made mistakes in politics; but that was better than always truckling to the winning side. We have nothing to be ashamed of. And you ought to be very glad that so much of the land remains ours——"

"Well, you will see what can be made of it," her brother said, confidently. "I don't regret now the long struggle to keep the place together; and once we get back to Corievreak, we'll have the watershed for the march again."

His face brightened up at this prospect.

"That will be something, Polly?" he said, gaily. "What a view there is from the tops all along that march! You've got the

whole of Inverness-shire spread out around you like a map. I think it was £8000 my grandfather got for Corrievreak ; but I suppose Sir John will want £15,000. I know he is ready to part with it, for it is of little use to him ; it does not lie well with his forest. But if we had it back—and with the sheep taken off Allt-nam-ba——”

“ Jim says you ought to make Corrievreak the sanctuary,” his sister remarked ; and, indeed, she seemed quite as much interested as he in these joyful forecasts.

“ Why, of course. There couldn’t be a better——”

“ And I was saying that if you planted the Rushen slopes, and built a good large comfortable lodge there, you would get a far better rent for the forest. You know, it isn’t like the old days, Archie. The people who come from the south now come because it is the fashion ; and they must have a fine house for their friends——”

“ Yes, and hot luncheons sent up the hill—with champagne glasses and table-napkins ! ” said he. “ No more biscuits and a flask to last you from morning till night. The next thing

will be a portable dining-table, that can be taken up into one of the corries; and then they will have finger-glasses, I suppose, after lunch. No matter. For there is another thing, my sweet Mrs. Graham, that perhaps you have not considered: it may come to pass that, as time goes on, we may not have to let the forest at all. That would be much better than being indebted to your tenant for a day's stalking in your own forest."

And then it seemed to strike him that all this planning and arranging—on the basis of Yolande's fortune—sounded just a little bit mercenary.

"To hear us talking like this," said he, with a laugh, "any one would imagine that I was marrying in order to improve the Lynn estate. Well, we haven't quite come to that yet, I hope. If it were merely a question of money, I could have gone to America, as I said. That would have been the market for the only kind of goods I've got to sell. No. I don't think any one can bring that against me."

"I, for one, would not think of accusing you of any such thing," said his sister, warmly.

"I hope you would have more pride. Jim was poor enough when I married him."

"Now, if I *were* marrying for money," said he—and he seemed eager to rebut this charge—"I would have no scruples at all about asking Yolande to go and live at Lynn. Of course it would be a very economical arrangement. But would I? I should think not. I wouldn't have her shut up there for anything. But I hope she will like the house, as a visitor, and get on well with my father and my aunt. Don't you think she will produce a good impression? What I hope for most of all is that Jack Melville may take a fancy to her. That would settle it in a minute, you know. Whatever Melville approves, that is right—at the Towers, or anywhere else. It's his cheek, you know. He believes in himself; and everybody else believes in him. It isn't only at Gress that he is the dominie. 'He is a scholar and a gentleman'—that is my beloved auntie's pet phrase, as if his going to Oxford on the strength of the Ferguson scholarship made him an authority on the right construction of a salmon-ladder."

“ Is that the way you speak of your friends behind their back ?”

“ Well, he jumps upon me considerable,” said he, frankly ; “ and I may as well take it out of him, when he is at Gress, and I am in Egypt. No matter. If he takes a fancy to Yolande, it will be all right. That is how they do with cigars and wines in London—‘ specially selected and approved by Messrs. So-and-so.’ It is a guarantee of genuine quality. And so it will be ‘ Yolande Winterbourne, approved by Jack Melville of Monaglen and forwarded on to Lynn Towers.’ ”

“ If that is all, that can be easily managed,” said his sister, cheerfully. “ When she is with us at Inverstroy, we will take her over to call on Mrs. Bell.”

“ I know what Mrs. Bell will call her—I know the very phrase : she will say, ‘ She is a bonny doo, that.’ The old lady is rather proud of the Scotch she picked up in the south.”

“ She ought to be prouder of the plunder she picked up farther south still. She ‘ drew up wi’ glaiket Englishers at Carlisle-ha’ to some purpose.”

“ Yes ; and Jack Melville will have every

penny of it; and a good solid nest-egg it must be by this time. I am certain the old lady has an eye on Monaglen. What an odd thing it would be if Melville were to have Monaglen handed over to him just as we were getting back Corrievreak! I think there are some curious changes in store in that part of the world."

At this point Mrs. Graham pulled up her sorry steed, and waited until the rest of the cavalcade came along.

"Yolande dear," said she, in a tone of remonstrance, "why don't you come on in front, and get less of the dust?"

Yolande did as she was bid.

"I have been so much interested," said she, brightly. "What a chance it is to learn about Afghanistan and Russia—from one who knows, as Colonel Graham does. You read and read in Parliament; but they all contradict each other. And Colonel Graham is quite of my papa's opinion."

"Well, now, the stupidity of it!" said pretty Mrs. Graham, with an affected petulance. "You people have been talking away about Afghanistan, and Archie and I have been

talking away about the Highlands—in the African desert. What is the use of it? We ought to talk about what is around us——”

“I propose,” said the Master of Lynn, “that Yolande gives us a lecture on the antiquities of Karnac.”

“Do you know, then, that I could?” said she. “But not this Karnac. No; the one in Brittany. I lived near it at Auray for a long time before I was taken to the Château.

“My dear Yolande,” exclaimed Mrs. Graham, “if you will tell us about yourself, and your early life, and all that, we will pack off all the mummies and tombs and pillars that ever existed!”

“But there is no story at all, except a sad one,” said the girl. “My uncle was a French gentleman—ah, so kind he was!—and one day in the winter he was shot in the woods when he and the other gentlemen were out. Oh, it must have been terrible when they brought him home—not quite dead; but they did not tell me; and perhaps I was too young to experience all the misery. But it killed my aunt, who had taken me away from England when my mother died. She would

not see any one; she shut herself up; then one morning she was found dead; and then they sent for my father, and he took me to the ladies at the Château. That is all. Perhaps, if I had been older, I should have understood it more, and been more grieved; but now, when I look back at Auray and our living there, I think mostly of the long drives with my aunt, when my uncle was away at the chase, and often and often we drove along the peninsula of Quiberon, which not every one visits. And was it a challenge, then," she added, in a brighter way, "about a lecture on Carnac? Oh, I can give you one very easily. For I have read all the books about it; and I can give you all the theories about it, each of which is perfectly self-evident, and all of them quite contradictory. Shall I begin? It was a challenge."

"No, Yolande, I would far rather hear your own theory," said he, gallantly.

"Mine? I have not the vanity," she said, lightly. "But this is what all the writers do not know—that, besides the long rows of stones in the open plains—oh, hundreds and thousands, so thick that all the farmhouses

and the stone walls have been built of them — besides these, all through the woods, wherever you go, you come upon separate dolmens, sometimes almost covered over. My aunt and I used to stop the carriage, and go wandering through the woods in search ; and always we thought these were the graves of pious people who wished to be buried in a sacred place—near where the priests were sacrificing in the plain—and perhaps that their friends had brought their bodies from some distant land——”

“ Just as the Irish Kings were carried to Iona to be buried,” said the Master.

“ But, Yolande dear,” said Mrs. Graham, who was more interested in the story of Yolande’s youth than in Celtic monuments, “ how did you come to keep up your English, since you have lived all your life in France ?”

“ But my aunt spoke English, naturally,” said she. “ Then at the Château one of the ladies also spoke it—oh, I assure you, there was no European language she did not speak. Nor any country she did not know, for she had been travelling companion to a noble

lady. And always her belief was that you must learn Latin as the first key."

"Then did you learn Latin, Yolande?" the Master of Lynn inquired, with some vague impression that the question was jocular, for Yolande had not revealed any traces of erudition.

"If you will examine me in Virgil, I think I shall pass," said she; "but in Horace—not at all! It is distressing the way he twists the meaning about the little short lines, and hides it away; I never had patience enough for him. Ah, there is one who does not hide his meaning—there is one who can write the line that goes straight and sounding and majestic. You have not to puzzle over the meaning when it is Victor Hugo who recounts to you the story of *Ruy Blas*, of *Cromwell*, of *Angelo*, of *Hernani*. That is not the poetry that is made with needles!"

Mrs. Graham was scarcely prepared for this declaration of faith.

"My dear Yolande," said she, cautiously, "Victor Hugo's dramas are very fine; but I would not call them meat for babes. At the Château, now——"

"Oh, they were strictly forbidden,' she said, frankly. "Madame would have stormed if she had known. But we read them all the same. Why not? What is the harm? Every one knows that there is crime and wrong in the world; why should one shut one's eyes? —that is folly. Is it not better to be indignant that there should be such crime and wrong? If there is any one who takes harm from such writing, he must be a strange person."

"At all events, Yolande," said he, "I hope you don't think that all kings are scoundrels, and all convicts angels of light? Victor Hugo is all very well, and he thunders along in fine style; but don't you think he comes awfully near being ridiculous? He hasn't much notion of a joke, has he? Don't you think he is rather too portentously solemn?"

Well, this inquiry into Yolande's opinions and experiences — which was intensely interesting to him, and naturally so—was eliciting some odd revelations; for it now appeared that she had arrived at the conclusion that the French, as a nation, were a serious and sombre people.

"Do you not think so?" she said, with

wide eyes. "Oh, I have found them so grave. The poor people in the fields, when you speak to them and they answer, it is always with a sigh; they look sad and tired; the care of work lies heavily on them. And at the Château, also, everything was so serious and formal; and when we paid visits, there was none of the freedom, the amusement, the good humour of the English house. Sometimes, indeed, at Oatlands, at Weybridge, and once or twice in London, when my papa has taken me to visit, I have thought the mamma a little blunt in her frankness—in the expectation you would find yourself at home without any trouble on her part; but the daughters—oh, they were always very kind, and then so full of interest, about boating, or tennis, or something like that—always so full of spirits, and cheerful—no, it was not in the least like a visit to a French family. In France, how many years is it before you become friends with a neighbour? In England, if you are among nice people, it is—to-morrow! You, dear Mrs. Graham, when you came to Oatlands, what did you know about me? Nothing."

"Bless the child, had I not my eyes?" Mrs. Graham exclaimed.

"But before two or three days you were calling me by my Christian name."

"Indeed I did," said Mrs. Graham, "if it is a Christian name, which I doubt. But this I may suggest to you, my dear Yolande, that you don't pay me a compliment, after the friendship you speak of, and the relationship we are all hoping for, in calling me by my married name. The name of Polly is not very romantic——".

"Oh, dear Mrs. Graham, I couldn't!" said Yolande, almost in affright.

"Of course not," said the pretty young matron, with one of her most charming smiles. "Of course you couldn't be guilty of such familiarity with one of my advanced age. But I suppose Jim is right. I am getting old. Only he doesn't seem to consider that a reason for treating me with any increasing respect."

"I am sure I never thought of such a thing!" Yolande protested, almost in a voice of entreaty. "How could you imagine it!"

"Very well. But if you consider that

'Polly' is not in accordance with my age, or my serious character as a mother and a wife, there is a compromise in 'Mary,' which, indeed, was my proper name until I fell into the hands of men. I used always to be called Mary, until Archie and Jim began with their impertinence. And when we are in the Highlands together, you know, and you are staying with us at Investroy, or we are visiting you at Allt-nam-ba, or when we are all together at the Towers, whatever would the people think if they heard you call me 'Mrs. Graham'? They would think we had quarrelled."

"Then you are to be my sister Mary!" said Yolande, placidly; but the Master of Lynn flushed with pleasure when he heard that phrase.

"And I will be your champion and protectress when you come into our savage wilds in a way you can't dream of," continued pretty Mrs. Graham. "You don't know how we stand by each other in the Highlands. We stand up for our own; and you will be one of us in good time. And you haven't the least idea what a desperate person I am

when my temper is up—though Jim would tell you he knows. Well, now, I suppose that is the convent over there, behind those palms ; and we have been chattering the whole way about the Highlands, and Victor Hugo, and I don't know what ; and I haven't the least idea what we are going to see or what we have to do."

But here the dragoman came up to assume the leadership of the party ; and the Master of Lynn allowed himself to be eclipsed. He was not sorry. He was interested far less in the things around him than in the glimpses he had just got of Yolande's earlier years ; and he was trying to place these one after another, to make a connected picture of her life up till the time that this journey brought him and her together. Could anything be more preoccupying than this study of the companion who was to be with him through all the long future time ? And already she was related to him ; she had chosen his sister to be hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PHRASE.

BUT these idle wanderings of theirs in Upper Egypt were destined to come to a sudden end. One evening they were coming down the river, and were about to pass Merhadj, when they saw young Ismat Effendi putting off in another boat, evidently with the intention of intercepting them. They immediately ordered their boat to be pulled in to the shore; and as Ismat said he wanted to say something to them, they stepped on board his father's dahabeeah, and went into the saloon, for the sake of coolness.

Then the bright-faced young Egyptian, who seemed at once excited and embarrassed, told them, in his fluent and oddly-phrased English, that he was much alarmed; and that his alarm was not on account of any danger that might happen to them, but was

the fear that they might think him discourteous and inhospitable.

"Who could think that!" said pretty Mrs. Graham, in her sweetest way.

"Of course not. What's the matter?" said her husband, more bluntly.

Then young Ismat proceeded to explain that the latest news from the capital was not satisfactory ; that many Europeans were leaving the country : that the reports in the journals were very contradictory ; and that, in short, no one seemed to know what might not happen. And then he went on to implore them, if he suggested that they ought to return to Cairo, and satisfy themselves of their safety, by going to the English Consulate there, not to imagine that he wished them to shorten their visit, or that his father desired to dispossess them of the dahabeeah. "How could that be," he said, quite anxiously, "when here was another dahabeeah lying idle ? No ; the other dahabeeah was wholly at their service, for as long as they chose ; and it would be a great honour to his father, and the highest happiness to himself, if they were to remain at Merhadj for the longest

period they could command ; but was he not bound, especially when there were two ladies with them, to let them know what he had heard, and give them counsel ?”

“ My dear fellow, we understand perfectly,” said Colonel Graham, with his accustomed good humour. “ And much obliged for the hint. Fact is, I think we ought to get back to Cairo in any case ; for those women-folk want to have a turn at the bazaars, and by the time they have half ruined us, we shall just be able to get along to Suez, to catch the *Ganges*—”

“ We must have plenty of time in Cairo,” said Mrs. Graham emphatically.

“ Oh yes,” said he. “ Never mind the danger. Let them buy silver necklaces, and they won’t heed anything else. Very well, Mr. Ismat, come along with us now and have some dinner, and we can talk things over. We shall just be in time.”

“ May I ?” said the young Egyptian to Mrs. Graham. “ I am not intruding ?”

“ We shall be delighted if you will come with us,” said she, with one of her most gracious smiles.

"It will not be pleasant for me when you go," said he. "There is not much society here."

"Nor will you find much society when you come to see us at Inverstroy, Mr. Ismat," she answered. "But we will make up for that by giving you a true Highland welcome : shall we not, Yolande dear?"

Yolande was not in the least embarrassed. She had quite grown accustomed to consider the Highlands as her future home.

"I hope so," she said, simply. "We are not likely to forget the kindness Mr. Ismat has shown to us."

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" said he.

Now this resolve to go back to Cairo, and to get along from thence in time to catch the P. and O. steamer *Ganges* at Suez, was hailed with satisfaction by each member of the little party, though for very different reasons. Mr. Winterbourne was anxious to be at St. Stephens' before the Budget ; and he could look forward to giving uninterrupted attention to his Parliamentary duties, for Yolande was going on to Inverstroy with the Grahams. Yolande herself was glad to think that soon

she would be installed as house-mistress at Allt-nam-ba ; she had all her lists ready for the shops at Inverness ; and she wanted time to have the servants tested before her father's arrival. Mrs. Graham, of course, lived in the one blissful hope of seeing Baby again ; while her husband was beginning to think that a little salmon-fishing would be an excellent thing. But the reason the Master of Lynn had for welcoming this decision was much more occult.

"Polly," he had said to his sister on the previous day, "do you know, your friend Miss Yolande——"

"My friend!" she said, staring at him.

"She seems more intimate with you than with any one else, at all events," said he. "Well, I was going to say that she takes things pretty coolly."

"I don't understand you."

"I say she takes things very coolly," he repeated. "No one would imagine she was engaged at all."

"Are you complaining of her, already?"

"I am not complaining. I am stating a fact."

"What is wrong, then? Do you want her to go about proclaiming her engagement? Why, she can't. You haven't given her an engagement-ring yet. Give her her engagement-ring first, and then she can go about and show it."

"Oh, you know very well what I mean. You know that no one cares less about sentimentality and that sort of thing than I do; I don't believe in it much; but still—she is just a trifle too business-like. She seems to say 'Did I promise to marry? Oh, very well; all right, when the time comes. Call again to-morrow.' Of course my idea would not be to have a languishing love-sick maiden always lolloping at your elbow; but her absolute carelessness and indifference——"

"Oh, Archie, how can you say such a thing! She is most friendly with you——"

"Friendly! Yes; so she is with Graham. Is it the way they bring up girls in France? —to have precisely the same amount of friendliness for everybody—lovers, husbands, or even other people's husband's. It is convenient, certainly; but things might get mixed."

"I wonder to hear you," said Mrs. Graham, indignantly. "You don't deserve your good fortune. The fact is, Yolande Winterbourne happens to have very good health and spirits, and she is naturally light-hearted; whereas, you would like to have her sombre and mysterious, I suppose; or perhaps it is the excitement of lovers' quarrels that you want. Is that it? Do you want to be quarrelling and making up again all day long? Well, to tell you the truth, Archie, you haven't hit on the right sort of girl. Now, *Shena Van* would have suited you; she has a temper that would have given you amusement."

"Leave Miss Stewart alone!" he said, roughly. "I wish there were many women in the world like her: if there are, I haven't met them."

"Yolande is too good for you."

"So she seems to think, at all events."

"Why don't you go and quarrel with her, then? What is the use of coming and talking over the matter with me?"

"With her? It wouldn't interest her. She would rather talk about the price of coals, or the chances of the Irish getting Home

Rule—anything but what ought to be the most important event in her life."

"Archie," said his sister, who did not attach too much seriousness to these temporary moods of disappointment, "if papa finds out that Mr. Winterbourne is half inclined, and more than half inclined, to favour Home Rule, he will go out of his senses."

"Let him go out of his senses," said her brother, with deliberate indifference. "I suppose the worst that could happen would be the breaking off of the match."

But this possibility, involving the destruction of all her beautiful plans and dreams of the future, instantly awoke her alarm; and her protest was emphatic.

"Archie," said she, regarding him sternly, "I beg you to remember that you are expected to act as a gentleman."

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I will tell you, plain enough. You have asked this girl to be your wife; she has accepted you; your engagement has been made known; and I say this, that if you were to throw her over—I don't care for what reason—you would stamp yourself as a

coward. Is that plain? A girl may be allowed to change her mind—at least, she sometimes does; and there is not much said against her; but the man who engages himself to a girl, and allows the engagement to be known and talked about, and then throws her over, I say is a coward, neither more nor less. And I don't believe it of you. I don't believe you would allow papa or any one else to interfere, now the thing is settled. The Leslies are not made of stuff like that."

"That is all very well"—he was going to urge; but the impetuous little woman would have her say.

"What is more, I honour her highly for her reserve. There is nothing more disgusting than to see young people dawdling and fondling in the presence of others. You don't want to be Jock and Jenny going to the fair, do you?"

"Look here, Demosthenes," he said, calmly. "You are as good as any one I know at drawing a herring across the scent; but you are perfectly aware all the time of what I mean."

This somewhat disconcerted her.

"Well, I am—in a way, she said; and her tone was now rather one of appeal. "But don't you see what life on board this boat is? It is all in the open. You cannot expect any girl to be confidential when you have scarcely ever a chance of talking to her by herself. You must make allowances, Archie. I do know what you mean: but—but I don't think you are right; and I, for one, am very glad to see her so light-hearted. You may depend on it, she hasn't sacrificed any one else in order to accept you. Her cheerfulness promises very well for the future—that is my idea of it; it shows that she is not thinking of somebody else, as girls sometimes do, even after they are engaged. Of course it isn't the girl's place to declare her sentiments; and it does happen sometimes that there is some one they would rather have had speak; and, of course, there is an occasional backward glance, even after marriage. In Yolande's case, I don't think there is. One cannot be certain; but I don't think there is. And why should you be disappointed because she does not too openly show her preference? Of course she

can't—in this sort of life. But you will have the whole field to yourself. You have no rival; and she has a quickly grateful nature. You will have her all to yourself in the Highlands. Here she is waiting on her father half the time, and the other half Jim is making fun with her. At Inverstroy it will be quite different."

"Well, perhaps. I hope so," said he.

"Of course it will! You will have her all to yourself. Jim will be away at his fences and his pheasant-coops; and I shall have plenty to do in the house. And if you want her to quarrel with you, I daresay she will oblige you. Most girls can manage that. But the first thing to be done, Archie—in sober seriousness—is to buy a very nice engagement-ring for her at Cairo; and that will be always reminding her. And I do hope it will be a nice one, a very handsome one indeed. You ought not to consider expense on such an occasion. If you haven't quite enough money with you, Jim will lend you some. It is certainly odd that she should have no family jewellery; but it is all the greater opportunity for you to give her

something very pretty; and you ought to show the Winterbournes, for your own sake, and for the sake of our family, that you can do the thing handsomely."

He laughed.

"To hear you, Polly, one would think you were an old woman—a thorough old schemer. And yet how long is it since your chief delight in life used to be to go tobogganing down the face of Bendyerg?"

"I have learnt a little common sense since then," said pretty Mrs. Graham, with a demure smile.

Well, he did buy a very handsome ring for her when they got to Cairo; and Yolande was greatly pleased with it, and said something very kind and pretty to him. Moreover, there was a good deal of buying going on. The gentlemen at the Consulate had expressed the belief that they were in no immediate danger of having their throats cut; and they set to work to ransack the bazaars with a right good will. Nor was there any concealment of the intent of most of those purchases. Of course they bought trinkets and bric-à-brac, mostly for presentation to

their friends; and Mr. Winterbourne insisted on Mrs. Graham accepting from him a costly piece of Syrian embroidery on which she had set longing eyes during their previous visit. But the great mass of their purchases—at least of Mr. Winterbourne's purchases—was clearly and obviously meant for the decoration of Yolande's future home. Under Mrs. Graham's guidance, he bought all sorts of silk stuffs, embroideries, and draperies. He had a huge case packed with hand-graven brass-work—squat, quaint candlesticks, large shields, cups, trays, and what not; and once, when, in an old curiosity shop, and Yolande happening to be standing outside, Mrs. Graham ventured to remonstrate with him about the cost of some Rhodian dishes he had just said he would take, he answered her thus—

“ My dear Mrs. Graham, when in Egypt we must do as the Egyptians do. Don't you remember the bride who came down to the river, bringing with her her bales of carpets and her drove of donkeys? Yolande must have her plenishing—that is a good Scotch word, is it not? ”

"But I should think she must have about a dozen of those sheikhs' head-dresses already," said pretty Mrs. Graham. "And we don't really have so many fancy-dress balls in Inverness. Besides, she could not go as a sheikh."

"Fancy-dress balls? Oh no; nothing of the kind. They will do for a dozen things in a room—to be pitched on to sofas—or on the backs of chairs—merely patches of fine colour."

"And that," said she, with a smile, looking at an antique Persian dagger, with an exquisitely carved handle and elaborately inlaid sheath,—"of what use will that be in the Highlands?"

"My dear madam," said he, with a perfectly grave face, "I have not listened to your husband and your brother for nothing. Is it not necessary to have something with which to gralloch a wounded stag?"

"To gralloch a stag with a beautiful thing like that!" she exclaimed in horror.

"And if it is too good for that, cannot Yolande use it as a paper-knife? You don't mean to say that when you and your husband

came home from India, you brought back no curiosities with you?"

"Of course we did; and long before that Jim had a whole lot of things from the Summer Palace at Pekin; but then, we are old people. These things are too expensive for young people just beginning."

"The bride must have her plenishing," said he, briefly; and then he began to bargain for a number of exceedingly beautiful Damascus tiles, which, he thought, would just about be sufficient for the construction of a fireplace.

Nor were these people the least bit ashamed when, some days after this, they managed to smuggle their valuable cases on board the homeward-bound steamer, without paying the Customs dues. Mr. Winterbourne declared that a nation which was so financially mad as to levy an 8 per cent *ad valorem* duty on exports—or rather that a nation which was so mad as to tax exports at all—ought not to be encouraged in its lunacy; and he further consoled his conscience by reflecting that, so far from his party having spoiled the Egyptians, it was doubtless all

the other way ; and that probably some £60 or £70 of English money had been left in the Cairene bazaars which had no right to be there. However, he was content. The things were such things as he had wanted ; he had got them as cheaply as seemed possible ; he would have paid more for them had it been necessary. For, he said to himself, even the rooms of a Highland shooting-box might be made more picturesque and interesting by these art-relics of other and former civilisations. He did not know what kind of home the Master of Lynn was likely to provide for his bride ; but good colours and good materials were appropriate anywhere ; and even if Yolande and her husband were to succeed to the possession of Lynn Towers, and even if the rooms there (as he had heard was the case at Balmoral) were decorated exclusively in Highland fashion, surely they could set aside some chamber for the reception of those draperies, and potteries, and tiles, and what not, that would remind Yolande of her visit to the East. The bride must have her plenishing, he said to himself again and again. But they bought no

jewellery, of a good kind, in Cairo ; Mr. Winterbourne said he would rather trust Bond Street wares.

And at last the big steamer slowly sailed away from the land ; and they had begun their homeward voyage. Mrs. Graham and her husband were on the hurricane-deck ; she was leaning with both arms on the rail.

"Good-bye, Egypt," said she, as she regarded the pale yellow country under the pale turquoise sky. " You have been very kind to me. You have made me a most charming present to take back with me to the Highlands."

"What, then ?" said her husband.

"A sister."

"She isn't your sister yet," he said, gruffly.

"She is ; and she will be," she answered, confidently. "Do you know, Jim, I had my hopes and wishes all the way out ; but I could never be sure ; for Archie is not easily caught. And I don't think she distinguished him much from the others on the voyage here ; except in so far as he was one of our party. Sometimes I gave it up, to tell you

the truth. And then again it seemed so desirable in every way ; for I had got to like the girl myself ; and I could see that Archie would be safe with her ; and I could see very well, too, that Mr. Winterbourne had his eyes open, and that he seemed very well disposed towards it."

" You must have been watching everybody like a cat," her husband said, in not too complimentary fashion.

" Can you wonder that I was interested ? " she said, in protest. " Just fancy what it would be for us if he had brought some horrid insufferable creature to Lynn ! I wouldn't have gone near the place ; and we have little enough society as it is. But that life on the Nile did it ; and I knew it would, the moment the dahabecah had started away from Asyoot—being all by ourselves like that, and he paying her little attentions all day long. He couldn't help doing that, could he ?—it wouldn't have been civil. And I foresaw what the end would be ; and I am very glad of it ; and quite grateful to Egypt and the Nile, despite all the flies and the mosquitoes."

"I daresay it will turn out all right," her husband said, indifferently.

"Well, you don't seem very delighted," she exclaimed. "Is that all you have to say? Don't you think it is a very good thing?"

"Well, yes, I do think it is a good thing. I have no doubt they will get on very well together. And in other respects the match will be an advantageous one."

"That is rather cold approval," said she, somewhat disappointed.

"Oh no, it isn't," said he, and he turned from looking at the retreating land and regarded her. "I say I don't think he could have chosen better; and I believe they will be happy enough; and they ought to be comfortable and well off. Isn't that sufficient? He seems fond of her; I think they will lead a very comfortable life. What more?"

"But there is something behind what you say, Jim; I know there is," she said.

"And if there is, it is nothing very serious," said he; and then he added with a curious sort of smile: "I tell you I think it will come out all right; I am sure it will. But you

can't deny this, Polly—well, I don't know how to put it. I may be mistaken. I haven't as sharp eyes as yours. But I have a fancy that this marriage, though I have no doubt it will be a happy enough one, will be, on her side at least——”

“What then?” said his wife, peremptorily.

“I don't quite know whether the French have a phrase for it,” said he, evasively, but still with the same odd smile on his face. “Probably they have; they ought to have, at least. At any rate, I have a kind of fancy —now it's nothing very terrible—I say I have a dim kind of fancy that on her side the marriage will be something that might be called a *mariage de complaisance*. Oh, you needn't go away in a temper. There have been worse marriages than a *mariage de complaisance*.”

END OF VOL. I.

